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**Teachers' role in enhancing self-esteem  
of students with dyslexia in the  
lower secondary level**

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# **Teachers' role in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level**

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## DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that I developed this dissertation independently with the use of the resources listed in the bibliography.

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## ABSTRACT

Self-esteem has been one of the most researched issues in educational psychology. In recent times, there has been a growing interest regarding the affective aspect of dyslexia. Empirical evidence suggests that students with dyslexia manifest lower self-esteem. Therefore, it was deemed vital to further explore what has been and can be done to address the issue, especially by teachers who play an important role in the lives of children with dyslexia.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the roles teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia aged 14 and 15 years in basic schools. The research question that guided this study was "What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?" with special focus on students' perceptions regarding their self-esteem, teachers' perceptions regarding their students' self-esteem and the strategies teachers used to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Seven students and eight teachers from two basic schools participated in this qualitative case study employing an interpretive and exploratory approach. Students' self-esteem was measured using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. Data was also solicited using document analysis, semi-structured interviews and semi-projective tasks such as Three Magic Wishes Task and Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task. As for teachers, semi-structured interview was the primary research tool.

The study found that students exhibited a high level of global and domain-specific self-esteem which was not consistent with general consensus that students with dyslexia projected low self-esteem. Students also demonstrated strong bonding with teachers, peers and parents and adopted a positive view about dyslexia. They also had a very clear direction about their academic and future direction in life. Teachers, on the other hand, believed that students generally had lower self-esteem although some perceived high self-esteem could also be exhibited in areas students were good at. Most teachers conceived that peer and parental support was more important to influence self-esteem of students compared to teacher or school support. Teachers essentially adopted various strategies to enhance self-esteem such as developing an accepting attitude towards students with dyslexia, encouraging free communication, facilitating peer tutoring, encouraging co-operative learning, providing accommodations in classroom, using praise and encouraging parent-teacher collaboration. All of these strategies corresponded with what most research recommended to facilitate better learning process of students with dyslexia and as a result enhance self-esteem.

Overall, in facilitating the strategies, teachers play an important role as motivator, enabler and encourager of positive self-esteem among students with dyslexia. As a result, this study also opens the door of opportunity for further research exploring students' self-esteem in different educational context.

**KEYWORDS:** Dyslexia, high self-esteem, global self-esteem, domain-specific self-esteem, students with dyslexia, teachers and strategies

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present the objectives for undertaking research in the field of dyslexia in the Czech Republic. Together with an overview of the provision for children with dyslexia in the Czech education system, I will discuss how the context in my home country Malaysia provided the backdrop and motivation for the current study.

#### **1.1 Background to study**

As inclusive or integrated schools become prevalent in Europe and around the world, more regular teachers are required to cater for students with developmental dyslexia in mainstream schools. Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2005: 1,301) state that “developmental dyslexia is characterised by an unexpected difficulty in reading in children and adults who otherwise possess the intelligence and motivation considered necessary for accurate and fluent reading”. As teachers struggle to balance the needs of students with dyslexia with those of other students, it is often possible for students with dyslexia to be neglected or branded as “lazy” or “stupid” when they fail to meet basic academic expectations. This can have adverse effects on the self-esteem of the students.

The role of self-esteem in academic achievement has been one of the most controversial issues in educational psychology in recent years. A recent research review has suggested that there is little evidence that self-esteem influences achievement in any meaningful way (Baumeister et al., 2003). However, there is also growing empirical evidence to suggest that young people with dyslexia manifest lower self-esteem than others (Burden & Burdett, 2005; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002; Riddick, 1996). For example, research has shown clear links between self-concept, self-esteem and academic performance, and it is already established that students with dyslexia, because of their difficulties with reading, spelling and written language, can experience problems in academic achievement. In addition, there is research linking peer acceptance and social relationships to students’ academic performance and low self-esteem (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

Having known the effect dyslexia has on the self-esteem of students, it is vital to further explore what has been and can be done to address the issue, especially by teachers who play an important role in the lives of students with dyslexia. Students' relationships with their teachers can be a crucially important influence affecting their connection to school, motivation, academic performance and psychosocial well-being. Students spend a great deal of time at school and the classroom is the source of many of their interpersonal relationships and activities. Although students' social adjustment to school was initially examined primarily through relationships with classroom peers, research increasingly has highlighted the significance of student-teacher relationships.

As Peer and Reid (2003) suggest:

"Dyslexia is a label but one that can carry significant weight in terms of resources, examination support, teaching approaches, assessment needs, curriculum differentiation and management, and parental involvement. For those reasons, it is important that the class teacher has more than just an awareness of dyslexia, and has instead a sound understanding of the nature of the dyslexic profile underpinning this label, the characteristics of dyslexia and how children and young people with dyslexia can best be supported in all areas of the curriculum" (Peer and Reid, 2003:9).

This suggests that with a better understanding of the nature of the difficulties associated with dyslexia, teachers can provide not only academic but also emotional support that will enhance the self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

## **1.2 Motivation for study**

The motivation to undertake a study into the self-esteem of students with dyslexia is twofold. Firstly, there appears to be a paucity of studies exploring the perceptions and voices of students with dyslexia regarding their own self-esteem. How teachers perceive students' self-esteem and take steps to address the problem triggered me to explore this issue to gain deeper insight into the practice in mainstream schools in Europe. Some studies have already examined how teachers and students rate self-esteem, and students' self-perceptions and attitude towards their teachers' behaviour and effect on their own self-esteem (Humphrey, 2002). Most students have pinpointed teachers' negative attitude and failure to provide

sufficient support as attributes to their own low self-esteem. It will be interesting to further explore how teachers perceive this criticism and what steps they have taken to enhance self-esteem among students with dyslexia.

Secondly, the challenges faced by teachers in my country, Malaysia, in integrating children with dyslexia into the regular classroom in mainstream schools provide a strong motivation. The concept of specific developmental dyslexia is very much in its infancy in Malaysia (Gomez, 2004). It is estimated that 10 per cent or 300,000 pupils in mainstream primary and secondary schools have dyslexia (Berita Dyslexia, 2003), which is consistent with the international prevalence of five to 10 per cent of population with dyslexia in every country (Shaywitz, 2005). In Malaysia, dyslexia constitutes the highest ratio of learning disability of about 50 per 1,000 pupils compared with one per 600 with Down Syndrome and two per 1,000 for children with cerebral palsy (2003). Although children with dyslexia constitute a rising incidence of student population with special needs and the highest number of students to be integrated in mainstream schools, an acute lack of recognition from the government leaves parents frustrated as their children struggle to cope within the current education system.

In 2001, a working panel was set up by the Malaysian Education Ministry's Department of Special Education Needs to initiate the National Dyslexia Programme with collaboration from dyslexia specialists of Universiti Putra Malaysia, clinical psychologists, paediatricians, special education needs teachers, speech therapists and parents (Haniz, 2003). A dyslexia pilot school project was introduced in 2004 aimed at enabling effective inclusion of children with dyslexia in mainstream schools. However, due to poor practice in schools, the project was shelved in 100 schools throughout Malaysia. Only three schools in Kuala Lumpur still run the program due to parental involvement and demand (Berita Dyslexia, 2006).

To date, there is still a lack of standardised instruments to assess children with dyslexia in primary or secondary schools other than a simple checklist called Senarai Semak Dyslexia. Formulated in 2001, the tool serves to test the level of mastery in reading, writing and numeracy skills of pupils entering Standard One in primary schools at age of seven. Interventions and resources are also limited where facilities for children with dyslexia are concerned. Parents, through Rotary clubs and non-governmental organisations, pushed for basic examination concessions such as extra test time and readers for national examinations. Awareness of dyslexia is also low among teachers as there is no adequate pre- or in-service

training. Although the Specialist Teacher Training College in Kuala Lumpur and a few local universities offer special educational needs courses that include a short module on dyslexia, it is deemed not enough to gain appropriate knowledge and skills to facilitate identification and intervention for children in schools (Gomez, 2004). Training for regular teachers is non-existent altogether.

My interest in the research stems from my association with a non-governmental organisation called Dyslexia Association of Malaysia set up in 1995 to support children with dyslexia. Having served as an elected committee member on a voluntary basis since 2000, I share the responsibility in supporting the cause of including children with dyslexia in mainstream primary schools through awareness and training programs for teachers and parents. The centre also runs intensive phonics training program for children and offers assessment and counseling services for primary school children.

The prominent issue that frequently crops up among parents during workshops is the teachers' lack of empathy, acceptance and understanding of children's problems and the effect they have on children's self-esteem. According to the president of Dyslexia Association of Malaysia Sariah Amirin, dyslexia is still very much an unknown concept in the country despite the efforts taken by the association to create awareness over the years. She asserts that children with dyslexia are being ignored in schools because teachers fail to understand the characteristics of dyslexia. And even if they do, they are not trained to teach children affected by the condition.

Amirin (2008) argues thus:

"With the lack of trained teachers and special classes, these children are placed together with normal children. They are often behind in their studies. Because of this, they are called *bodoh* (a Malay word for stupid) or slow by the other children and ignored by the teachers. Since these children have no idea what is wrong with them, they may believe it when others say they are idiots. Imagine being called an idiot when you know you are not one." (Amirin in The NST Online, 2008)

This sentiment is often echoed by parents who are left to deal with the emotional and literacy difficulties of children. Those with adolescent children believe children face more challenges in having to cope with low self-esteem, lack of confidence and sense of alienation and self-doubt regarding school life, peers, family and personal life. Parents report that they do not get support from schools and teachers in terms of counseling, intervention programs or collaborative development programmes to enhance self-esteem of students.

On the teachers' part, they often cite large classroom size, growing number of children with dyslexia in classroom, overemphasis on academic achievement and lack of training as hindering factors to better cater to children with dyslexia.

As a result, the lack of empathy or support on the part of educators has left many students frustrated, secluded, rejected and helpless. In addition, some students fall victim to bullying and teasing from peers. This eventually results in increased school dropouts after the secondary school education or for those students who persevere, experience in schools continues to be a traumatic journey and they tend to carry psychosocial and emotional scars throughout their school life and into adulthood.

### **1.3 Purpose of study**

Against this backdrop, the current study will employ a qualitative multiple case study approach utilising qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and document analysis to answer the central research question of "What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?". The following sub questions will also be addressed:

1. What beliefs and perceptions do students have regarding their self-esteem?;
2. What beliefs and perceptions do teachers have regarding their students' self-esteem?;  
and
3. What strategies do teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia?

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the beliefs and perceptions students with dyslexia have regarding their self-esteem;
2. To develop a deeper understanding about the awareness, beliefs and perceptions teachers have regarding self-esteem of students with dyslexia; and
3. To gain insight into the roles teachers play in enhancing the self-esteem of students.

## **1.4 Context of study**

The study involved seven students with dyslexia aged 14 and 15 and eight class and subject teachers in two basic schools in the city of Prague, the Czech Republic. It was interesting to conduct the research in a country that had a long tradition with dyslexia. The first case of dyslexia was recognised in 1904 when neurologist Antonín Heveroch published an article referring about the case of an 11-year-old girl who was not able to read despite demonstrating other strengths in her school work (Zelinkova, 2004). The first professional assessment of a student with dyslexia was documented in 1952 by the Children's Psychiatric Clinic and constituted the beginning of systematic services for students with dyslexia in what was then Czechoslovakia (in 1989 its two nations had separated to form what are now the Czech and Slovak republics). Besides that, the first special class for children with dyslexia was introduced in 1962 at a children's hospital in Brno. By end of the 1960s, the support for children with dyslexia shifted entirely from the health to education sector.

### **1.4.1 Educational provisions for children with dyslexia in the Czech Republic**

Under the Czech education system, children with dyslexia attend compulsory school education that lasts nine years comprising grades one to five (the primary level which is called "first level" in the Czech Republic) and grades six to nine (secondary level which is called "second level" in the Czech Republic). Students enter grade one upon attaining age six. In the event of difficulty in learning, the child is referred to the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre. The diagnosis of dyslexia is determined based on comprehensive assessment administered and analysed by a team comprising a psychologist and a special educator. A diagnosis report is given which contains the assessment findings and recommendations as to the instructional methods and approaches to be employed with the child. Parents get a copy of the report as well as recommendations on how to provide appropriate home support for the child. It is the choice of parents whether they want to give the report to the school their child attends.

Younger children are commonly referred for assessments at the end of grade one and through grade two and three (between ages seven and nine) (European Training Foundation, 2003). Older students may also be referred for a literacy (reading and writing) assessment (ages 13 to 15). A battery of diagnostic tests has also been developed in recent years for use with high school students (ages 15 to 18). At the same time, assessment tools had been developed for



identifying pre-school children who are at risk for dyslexia due to genetic or developmental factors.

The diagnosis of dyslexia may result in placement of children under one of the multi-track school options (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2006):

- Mainstream school;
- Special class within mainstream school; and
- School for children with specific learning difficulties and behavioural problems

According to Amendment to School Law Number 73/2005, there are two forms of integration: individual and group integration. Individual integration is where a child who is diagnosed with special educational needs is placed in mainstream school or in school primarily focused on children with other kind of special educational needs (e.g., school for children with visual impairment). Group integration denotes placing children with special educational needs in special classes within mainstream schools or special educational setups such as mini dyslexia classes.

Students integrated into the regular stream, which is the focus of this study as it corresponds with the integrated school setting in Malaysia, are taught according to individualised education plans which are developed for the entire school year, and may be modified during the course of the year. The individualised education plan contains information regarding the student's knowledge and skills, goals for the current school year, details of instructional interventions, individualised accommodations, evaluation and the manner of collaboration between the school and the students' family.

Students in group integration setups such as mini dyslexia classes attend regular classes but are withdrawn for special class for instruction in the Czech language and reading. Thereafter, in subsequent years, the number of hours spent in the special class decreases relative to students' progress and available teacher resources (European Training Foundation, 2003).

Special classes are offered in basic schools for a maximum of 15 students per class. Textbooks and curriculum are identical to the regular stream but differs in the method of instruction which takes into account each student's specific difficulties. Currently, there are very few special schools for children with specific learning difficulties and behavioural problems in the Czech Republic due to the current aim to integrate students with special learning difficulties in regular mainstream schools (2003).

In addition to mainstream schools, the Ministry of Education provides services through Psychological Educational Counseling Centre and Special Educational Centres which play an important role in supporting children with special educational needs. Some of the services offered include counseling services for children and adolescents with dyslexia as well as parents and teachers in schools (Zelinkova, 2004).

### **1.5 Significance of study**

In reference to the infancy stage of dyslexia in the Malaysian context as demonstrated earlier, it is evident that all aspects pertaining to facilities and support for children with dyslexia requires immediate attention. This is more so in the aspect of self-esteem among pupils in schools which profoundly is lacking in research or awareness among teachers. As most research has justified the need for shift of focus to non-academic areas of dyslexia, there is certainly much need for investigation into the nature and level of self-esteem especially through the lens of the children themselves and teachers both in the Czech Republic and Malaysia. Since both countries portray a gap in self-esteem studies, this research will be beneficial to gain empirical data of teachers' role in addressing the self-esteem of children with dyslexia.

The Czech experience could be used as a pilot study to initiate a larger scale study to fill the gap and paucity in research in this arena in Malaysian primary schools. The findings will also be significant to create awareness among teachers in mainstream school settings in Malaysia about children's self-esteem and perhaps the strategies and interventions employed by Czech teachers could serve as important indicators to better cater to the emotional needs of children with dyslexia. Since children with dyslexia are relatively better provided for in the Czech education system through regular assessments, psychological service, counseling and specialised teaching materials compared to Malaysia, it will be significant to learn whether it has any effect on self-esteem of children with dyslexia.

### **1.6 Summary**

This chapter primarily outlined the background and motivation for the present study. The concept of dyslexia and self-esteem was described after which the purpose, the context and the significance of the study were discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the key concepts of dyslexia and self-esteem, significance and implications of self-esteem to learning process of children with dyslexia, past research studies on self-esteem as well as the relevance of current self-esteem study to children with dyslexia in Malaysia.

#### **2.1 Definition of dyslexia**

Current literature reveals that numerous definitions have been used to describe dyslexia, leading to ambiguity and confusion especially among those in the education fraternity. The core reasons for this confusion perhaps stem firstly from the multi-faceted nature of dyslexia and its associated difficulties (Reid, 2005) and, secondly, the broad range of studies and viewpoints on the cause of dyslexia.

Lyon et al's (2003) definition clarifies the symptoms of dyslexia as follows:

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction” (Lyon et al, 2003:13).

Perhaps the recently revised definition by the British Dyslexia Association helps to clearly portray the range of difficulties experienced by persons with dyslexia as follows:

“Dyslexia a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by

appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling” (British Dyslexia Association, 2007).

This definition appears not only comprehensive but also relevant to the current trends in education. It is also relevant to my research context as the definition aligns closely with the underlying rationale of the research question of this study which essentially supports the view that dyslexia relates to a broad range of difficulties associated with literacy and learning; that individual differences will be present, therefore, requiring individual learning styles; and that children with dyslexia may need specialised teaching methods and interventions such as supportive counseling to help them in their learning process. Furthermore, this definition gives a straightforward construct to teachers who may otherwise be confused by the myriads of interpretations and descriptions of dyslexia. However, a limitation of this definition as with many others is that it does not address the issue of self-esteem explicitly or its related components, which is often cited as the “emotional side-effect” (Burton, 2004) of dyslexia due to cognitive difficulties.

## **2.2 Literacy difficulties faced by children with dyslexia**

As highlighted by the definitions earlier, children with dyslexia display “weaknesses in certain crucial areas associated with acquiring literacy skills including the auditory and visual processing of sounds and symbols; organisation and sequencing, directionality and orientation; and expressive and receptive language, especially where written work and information processing are concerned” (Thomson et al, 1997:2). In some instances, gross and fine motor control, co-ordination, balance and body image can also pose problems (3). This evidence supports the view that children with dyslexia have problems that affect their learning and, therefore, it is vital for teachers to be aware of the problems and provide adequate academic and emotional support to cater to their learning needs in school.

## **2.3 The process of learning and implications for children with dyslexia**

Learning is a cognitive process and, often, the difficulties experienced by children with dyslexia are of a cognitive nature. Reid (2005) defines the cognitive process as follows:

“Cognition refers to thinking and the different processes the learner engages in during thinking, problem-solving and learning. These processes include short- and long-term memory, processing speed and processing style as well as the use of background

information and previous knowledge. How information is processed and how the curriculum is developed influences learning and not merely the factors relating to the cognitive difficulties experienced by the child.” (Reid, 2005:32)

Awareness of learning styles and meta-cognitive strategies which can enhance the learning process throughout the full curriculum is of great importance. Together, these factors provide a sound basis for staff development and assessment, teaching and classroom practices which can enhance the opportunities for success of children with dyslexia. The factors that are important for successful learning, therefore, include information processing, curriculum development, learning styles, strategies for learning, teaching style, and the classroom and school context (Given & Reid, 1999). The knowledge of learning process is crucial to the current study as it will help in identifying how the process is delayed in children with dyslexia due to their cognitive difficulties and its consequent effect on self-esteem.

## **2.4 Concept of self-esteem**

Literature shows that the study of self-esteem originated from a psychosocial perspective. The concept first emerged in psychology and can be traced to the writings of psychologist William James in the late 19th century. James (1890) developed the concept coincidentally during the same historical period in which Stanley Hall (1904) coined the term adolescence (Flynn, 2003).

### **2.4.1 Understanding the concept of “self” in self-esteem**

Smelser’s (1989, in Humphrey, 2004) observation that “although one has a “fairly firm grasp of what is meant by self-esteem as revealed by our own introspection and observation of the behaviour of others, it is hard to put that understanding into precise words” holds true when one delves into the intricacies of understanding and defining the term self-esteem. This perhaps stems from the fact that self-esteem is a part of the umbrella term used to describe the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs that make a person an individual that is the self (Humphrey, 2002). Myriads of terms such as “self-concept”, “self-esteem”, “self-image”, “self-perceptions” and “self-worth” are used in reference to an individual’s cognitions and feelings about the self (Humphrey & Mullins, 2002). In the psychology discourse, these terms are often used interchangeably (Lawrence, 1996). Three constructs contribute to overall “sense of self”, namely self-concept, self-esteem and ideal self (Humphrey, 2004). The first of these, self-concept, is used to describe an individual’s perceived competencies and is,

therefore, descriptive in nature. The second, ideal self, is used in reference to an individual's pretensions (how they would like to be) and is aspirational in nature. Finally, self-esteem is an evaluation of personal worth based on the difference between one's ideal self and one's self-concept (2004).

Humphrey and Mullins (2002) in placing dyslexia in this context argue that:

"Attempting to conceptualise the effects of dyslexia on self-concept and/or self-esteem levels alone, however, is both simplistic and naive. The "self", the umbrella term by which we refer to the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem, does not operate in isolation, and as such the effects of learning difficulties such as dyslexia must also be assumed to reach other areas of the child's psychological profile" (Humphrey & Mullins, 2002:196)

In echoing this, Grant (1998, in Yu, 2002) says that although some researchers have made a distinction between self-esteem and self-concept, most of them view self-esteem as included under the broader term of self-concept. Therefore, it appears that although the focus of the current research is mainly on self-esteem, it is important that the other two constructs are defined given the mutual interdependence between the three (that is, one cannot arrive at an acceptable definition of self-esteem without mentioning self-concept and ideal self).

## **2.5 Definition of self-esteem**

Definitions provided by key proponents of self-esteem research and discourse are presented to help derive a deeper understanding of the concept. It is noteworthy to mention that although some of the definitions and writings date as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they still appear to be widely applied by contemporary researchers in recent times.

The earliest definition by William James in "Principles of Psychology" (1890) viewed self-esteem as being the "sum of our successes divided by our pretensions that is what we think we ought to achieve." James proposed that self-esteem could be increased by achieving great successes and maintained by avoiding failures. Raised self-esteem could, he argued, also be achieved and maintained by adopting less ambitious goals. Self-esteem was, therefore, defined as being competence-oriented but also opened to change (James, K, 2002).

Rosenberg (1965), meanwhile, saw self-esteem as "an evaluation of oneself" and "subjective life of the individual, largely one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour". He introduced the



concept of "worthiness" whereby one judges himself or herself as being good or bad. In other words, self-esteem is seen as "an evaluative attitude towards oneself" (Owens et al, 2001). Rosenberg also identified two important components embedded within self-esteem which are:

1. Feelings of self-worth based primarily on reflected appraisals; and
2. Feelings of efficacy based on observations of the effects of one's own actions.

Therefore, he sums one's self-esteem and social behaviour as a product of the two jointly operating variables which are cognitive and affective.

In support of this view, Coopersmith (1967) in "The Antecedents of Self-Esteem" defined self-esteem as "the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy", succinctly merging James' "competence" and Rosenberg's "evaluation" components. Coopersmith added that self-esteem was important to a person's identity and awareness and that high and low self-esteem would influence behaviour in either positive or negative ways.

Similarly, Branden (1994) in "The Psychology of Self-Esteem", while acknowledging the two strands of self-esteem as being competence and worthiness, also emphasised the relationship between the two strands as being another factor in understanding self-esteem. He stated that self-esteem "is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living". In using the term "conviction", Branden seemed to imply that self-esteem was a fundamental value that was intrinsic to human beings and a fundamental human need. He proposed that the power of conviction about oneself was more than a judgement or a feeling but maintained that it was also a motivator that inspired behaviour. Later, in his "The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem", Branden (1994) further refined the concept of self-esteem as:

"...the confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life and confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values and enjoy the fruits of our efforts." (Branden, 1994)

Additionally, he wrote that:

"It (self-esteem) is directly affected by how we act. Causation flows in both directions. There is a continuous feedback loop between our actions in the world and our self-esteem. The level of our self-esteem influences how we act, and how we act influences the level of our self-esteem." (Branden, 1994)

Drawing from these ideas and perceptions, one tends to agree with Mruk (1999) when he sums up self-esteem as comprising three vital elements:

- there is a connection between competence and worthiness;
- it contains both cognitive and affective levels; and
- it is a dynamic phenomenon which can fluctuate and is susceptible to change.

Although the current research does not subscribe to any definition in particular, the researcher will use the same elements mentioned above to examine the state of self-esteem among children with dyslexia as a result of their learning difficulties and provide justifications as to why enhancing self-esteem may be important to maintain their sense of competence and worthiness in the educational setting.

## **2.6 Components of self-esteem**

The two vital components of self-esteem derived from the definitions above will be explained further in this section, namely the affective and cognitive components.

### **2.6.1 Affective component**

The affective component generally denotes the positive or the negative feelings one has towards the "self" (Steffenhagen, 1990). These feelings form part of the individual's emotional well-being and sense of self-worth which starts to develop at an early age. Children from an early age relate to their environment and can realise when they are accepted by others and when they are not (1990). This notion emphasises the importance of a warm home environment as well as supportive and loving parents.

### **2.6.2 Cognitive component**

The cognitive component comprises the beliefs and concepts that one holds about him or her self (Walz, 1991). However, Pelham and Swann (1989) assert that self-esteem may not be a simple cognitive process regarding one's abilities and achievements in life. In verifying this viewpoint, Steffenhagen (1990) contends that achieving certain goals in life may or may not lead to self-esteem, depending on how meaningful and important the goal is to the person. This suggests an underlying cognitive process that evaluates the goal and the meanings one attaches to it. For example, Steffenhagen (1990) cites the findings of a study how achieving



the same goal meant different things to different teenagers. He found that self-esteem was influenced positively when a goal achieved was of personal interest to one teenager and how there was no impact on self-esteem when the same goal did not mean anything significant to another teenager.

## **2.7 Global and domain-specific views of self-esteem**

Self-esteem, although conceptually viewed as a general global construct measured by a single uni-dimensional variable, actually reflects a much more complex, multi-dimensional causal model (Owens et al, 2001). It appears to involve many different images, perceptions, identities and cognitions that vary across situations. Self-esteem is made up of reflected appraisals (looking glass self), the process of social comparison, self-attribution (refers to the process whereby people make observations and attributions of their own behaviour), and identifications (which may be based on association with a group) (2001).

Therefore, understanding different dimensions of self-esteem such as global and domain-specific views of self-esteem is important to clarify the manner in which such self-evaluations take place (Bernichon et al, 2003). In this sense, global self-esteem refers to the way people feel about themselves, whereas domain-specific self-esteem refers to the way people appraise their particular abilities, talents and attributes (Brown et al, 2001). In most studies of students' self-esteem, a global self-esteem measure is employed. That is, researchers assess how participants feel about themselves generally in an overall sense.

Rosenberg (1986) contends that one problem with interpreting measures of global self-esteem in this way is that participants may be primed to think of their global self-esteem in the context in which the views of self are being assessed. For example, when students are administered measures of global self-esteem in a school setting, they may view themselves in terms of academics and make judgments about global self-esteem based on their school performance and achievements.

In the United States, researchers have found that academic performance was positively related to global self-esteem (Shavelson, 1985, in Yu, 2002) as school performance is an indicator of a student's worth and capability. Rosenberg (1986) pointed out further that in addition to academic self-concept, positive family relationships, the number of best friends and physical appearance were key variables that directly affected global self-esteem.

Little empirical research appears to exist on domain-specific self-esteem. The domain-specific concept proposes that a person may feel that she or he has poor academic skill, but a

great deal of common sense in other domains of their self (Conley, 2007). Indeed, such domain-specific self-esteem may be comforting because it allows people to maintain a positive view of themselves in the face of subpar performance in some domains (2007). To address this possibility, the present qualitative research will take both global and domain-specific self-esteem of students with dyslexia into account to gain better insight into their level of self-esteem.

## **2.8 Characteristics of individuals with high and low self-esteem**

### **2.8.1 High self-esteem**

Rosenberg (1986) sees a person with high self-esteem as likely to “seek personal growth, development and improvement by pushing themselves to the limits to exercise their capabilities” (Owens et al, 2001). He characterised the individual as not having feelings of superiority in the sense of arrogance, conceit, contempt for others and overwhelming pride. Rather he saw individuals as having self-respect, appreciating one’s own merits yet recognising personal faults. The person with high self-esteem doesn’t consider himself or herself as better than others, but neither does he consider himself or herself inferior to others. In the context of learning disability, children with dyslexia who have high self-esteem will display more confidence and will volunteer answers or try out new subjects or tasks than children with lower self-esteem. These high self-esteem children expect to succeed and attribute success to their skill or ability (Riddick et al, 1999). Coopersmith (1967) also found that teenagers with high self-esteem were usually more successful in both academic and social environments compared to teenagers with low self-esteem.

### **2.8.2 Low self-esteem**

In contrast, Rosenberg found that a deficient sense of the self has a profound impact on psychological functioning and mental health as well as on interpersonal behaviour (Owens et al, 2001). He found that low self-esteem individuals are more likely to feel awkward, shy, conspicuous and unable to express themselves with confidence. The low self-esteem person is always worried about making a mistake, being embarrassed or exposing themselves to ridicule. They have a strong incentive to avoid people or circumstances that reflect negatively on their feelings of self-worth. They are hyper-sensitive and hyper-alert to signs of rejection, inadequacy or rebuff. Rosenberg states that they tend to adopt a characteristic strategy for dealing with life that is protective and defensive. In addition, they are more depressed and

unhappy; have greater levels of anxiety; show greater impulse to aggression, irritability, and resentment; and suffer from a lack of satisfaction with life in general. They also have greater vulnerability to criticism, less self-concept stability, less faith in humanity and greater social anxiety.

Evidently, these characteristics are also experienced by children with dyslexia such as constant anxiety (Soan, 2004), low self-confidence, behaviour problems and signs of depressive thoughts and actions which may stem from frustration and high levels of stress (Ranaldi, 2003) due to their learning difficulties.

## **2.9 Low self-esteem in children with learning difficulties**

As alluded to the earlier discussion, research has substantiated evidence that children who experience problems in learning develop maladaptive self-referential styles (consistently refer to themselves in a negative way) and consequently low levels of self-esteem (Humphrey, 2003). Research on children integrated into mainstream schooling has generally pointed to lowered levels of self-esteem (Crozier, Ress-Morris-Beattie & Bellin, 1999). Researchers have become more aware of the effect self-esteem has on motivation, academic achievement and peer relations and how the experiences of having a learning difficulty can adversely affect self-esteem (Humphrey, 2003). As Lawrence (1996) states, "one of the most exciting discoveries in educational psychology in recent times has been in finding out how people's levels of achievement are influenced by how they feel about themselves (and vice-versa)".

There are arguments that both unrecognised and recognised children with dyslexia receiving insufficient or inappropriate support can feel devalued at school and turn to deviant behaviour. This is a response to their sense of low self-esteem induced by school and as a way of gaining recognition from their peers (Kirk & Reid, 2001, in Alexandar-Passe, 2006). Peer and Reid (2001) contend that "frustration leads very often to anti-social or deviant behaviour" among individuals with dyslexia, especially those with low self-esteem. Ott (1997) pinpoints that the additional loss of self-esteem, self-doubt and sensitivity to criticism experienced by teenagers with dyslexia arising from a feeling of failure may make them feel isolated and become alienated from their peers.

### **2.10 Current and related research**

Literature shows that there is still a paucity of research examining self-esteem among children with dyslexia (Humphrey, 2003, Reid, 2005) although it is a much-researched area in the field of psychology (Baumeister, 2003). Most studies tend to concentrate on broader social and emotional effects of dyslexia. As with most types of learning difficulty, research into dyslexia has mainly concentrated on causation and treatment (Reid, 2005). In the last 30 years, however, a smattering of articles has addressed other personal, social and emotional issues including self-esteem. In one of the earliest attempts, Rosenthal (1973) undertook a study to examine the development of self-esteem among children with dyslexia. He administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to children in the following groups: 1) children with dyslexia who came from families with some understanding of the child's difficulties; 2) children with dyslexia who came from families with no understanding of the child's difficulties; 3) children without dyslexia; and 4) children with asthma (who would provide an alternative control group since they were also suffering from a "disability"). Rosenthal's results showed that children with dyslexia had lower self-esteem than children without dyslexia and asthmatic children, and that those children with dyslexia from families with no awareness of the problem had lower levels of self-esteem than those whose families were better informed.

Similarly, Thomson and Hartley (1980) measured and assessed the self-concept and self-esteem of children with dyslexia. Significantly, this was the first study to look at the specific as well as the general dimensions of self in relation to dyslexia. As one might expect, both overall self-esteem and academic self-esteem were lower in children with dyslexia than in a control group of "normal" children. Thomson and Hartley also found differences between the groups in the association of constructs as measured using the Kelly Grid method. For example, children with dyslexia showed a significantly higher correlation between "good reading ability" and "happiness", translating to mean that children with dyslexia associate being a good reader with being happier than children without dyslexia do.

Riddick (1996) studied 22 children with dyslexia along with their parents and teachers and found that children with dyslexia felt disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, depressed and embarrassed by their learning difficulties. Half of them reported having been teased about their difficulties and many had bad experiences in mainstream education involving teachers who were either ignorant of or did not acknowledge the existence of dyslexia.

Alexandar-Passe (2006), in reference to Wally Morgan's 1997 study of delinquent/criminal people with dyslexia, noted that when children with dyslexia failed to keep up at school, their self-esteem dropped as they began to question their academic abilities (developed inferiority complexes). Some pupils might disrupt a class because they interpret the class work as threatening and use attention-seeking means to protect self-esteem. It was suggested that if the teacher, in class with pupils, could help re-interpret the nature and purpose of class work (keeping the child's self-esteem in mind), the child's behaviour would change (2006).

Low self-esteem also denotes the development of a poor or negative self-image. Such beliefs can become a self-fulfilling prophecy of expecting to fail (Riddick, 1996). Morgan and Klein (2001, in Alexandar-Passe, 2006) observed in their study that childhood experiences of being labelled "thick" and public humiliation caused by failing often resulted in choices which reinforced low self-esteem.

Besides examining the emotional side-effects and consequences of low self-esteem, past studies have also documented evidence that effective intervention strategies such as classroom intervention and whole school approaches such as self-development programs could help enhance the self-esteem and self-perceptions of students. For example, in 2001, Titheridge and Turpin (Burton, 2002) together with a teacher and a clinical nurse specialist used group work as a strategy to foster positive self-esteem in children aged between eight and nine years. The key task was to reflect on children's feelings by encouraging peer group comment and discussion to develop successful strategies for managing conflict and frustration. It was reported by the principal, special needs co-ordinator and class teachers that children showed improvement in their behaviour and peer relationships after the group work intervention.

Elbaum and Vaudhn (2001) also disclosed in their findings that effective classroom-based interventions could provide positive effects on the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Meanwhile, Humphrey (2002) in a study to examine teachers' and students' ratings of self-esteem called for the changing role of teachers, peers and the school environment to provide a more accepting and dyslexia-friendly educational climate for children as well as early identification and better provision of teaching strategies to offset the low self-esteem level among students with dyslexia in inclusive settings.

Interestingly, early studies suggested that segregation enhanced self-esteem of children with special needs (Gurney, 1988). Although this is not favourable to the aim of inclusive education, there is an important lesson to learn from these studies. Perhaps factors such as increased attention and resources, specially trained teachers and the opportunity for children to make more realistic comparisons between their own achievements and those of peers may have attributed to a conducive learning environment and thus heightened self-esteem in segregated schools (1988). These attributes and success factors could have been lacking in an inclusive setting, therefore, calling for more investigation into this area.

In discussing about learning environment, the role of teachers in recognising and addressing the issue of low self-esteem among children with dyslexia cannot be underestimated. However, a controversy is that sometimes teachers themselves could be a source of low self-esteem among children. For example, Humphrey and Mullins' study in 2001 showed that the influence of teachers as "significant others" was an important factor in the low self-esteem exhibited by children (Humphrey, 2002). Other studies have also revealed the effect of teachers' negative behaviour and attitude towards children with dyslexia and how their own low self-esteem influenced their teaching style and children's literacy attainment (Gurney, 1988).

A common solution offered by studies is to improve teachers' awareness and understanding (Riddick, 1996, Lawrence, 1996, Pianta et al 2002). Riddick (1996) asserts this may be hard to reach since those educationalists that are more hostile to or critical of the concept of dyslexia are the least likely to read about or take further training in a condition they don't think exists. Lawrence (1996) suggests perhaps warm relationship between teachers and pupils and developing desirable counseling qualities may have a positive effect on the self-esteem of pupils.

Teacher support also has an impact on psychological adjustment in older students (Pianta et al, 2002). For example, students who attended middle schools that sought to enhance teacher-student relationships tended to have fewer adjustment difficulties during the transition period. Indeed, changes in perceptions of teacher support predicted changes in both self-esteem and depression among middle school students. Students who perceived increasing teacher support showed corresponding decreases in depressive symptoms and increases in self-esteem while students who perceived decreasing teacher support showed increased depressive symptoms



and decreased self-esteem (2002). Other researchers have emphasised the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on students' social development with this support serving as a regulatory function in children's and adolescents' development of not only academic and behavioural but also emotional skills. These findings suggest that teacher support can help to buffer some of the stress associated with middle school thus offsetting the risk for adjustment difficulties.

The prevalent empirical evidence thus far further reinforces the fact that teachers' role in determining the state or level of self-esteem in children with dyslexia is not to be neglected or underestimated. Teachers are increasingly serving as children's "significant others" and as such "contribute to the make-up of pupils' self-esteem" (Humphrey, 2003). Teachers, therefore, could adopt a consistent approach to teaching pupils with dyslexia in which they are "accepting", "genuine" and "empathetic" (2003). In support of this view, the current study serves to draw on the findings and experiences of the past studies in the literature to examine the roles teachers play to help students with dyslexia develop positive self-esteem. Notably, since this research takes into account the voices of students themselves, it will be interesting to see what kind of results it yields and contributes to the field of self-esteem research in the Czech Republic.

### **2.11 Dyslexia in the Malaysian context and implications for research on self-esteem**

Based on my nearly decade-old experience as a member of a self-advocacy group catering to children with dyslexia, I am aware of the challenges and constant struggle faced by parents and teachers in addressing the emotional needs of children both in schools and at home. Parents and teachers are puzzled to see "bright and enthusiastic children who are not successfully learning to read and write" (Alexandar-Passe, 2006). One of the most critical factors affecting children's well-being is the pervading sense of low self-esteem manifested in the form of anxiety, depression and in extreme cases suicidal tendencies.

The situation in Malaysian schools could be traced to an acute lack of trained teachers, inclusion policies and legislations both at school and national levels, proper intervention programs, assessment tools and resources, support from education authorities, and collaborative teaching and teamwork among specialist and regular classroom teachers. Most importantly, lack of awareness about dyslexia among teachers leads to the children being ignored, neglected and segregated in classrooms. Children are often viewed as "dumb" or "slow" when in reality they just learn differently than other students (Mustapha, 2008).

Parents report increasing disciplinary or behavioural cases among children and how a lack of understanding and sensitivity leaves most children being victims of unfair punishment. Teachers fail to understand that in addition to academic support, emotional needs are also important for children with dyslexia such as counseling and motivational programs.

Since many children are diagnosed early in their academic stage, the seeds of a negative self-image are planted early and could complicate if not obliterate the opportunity for a healthy emotional base as these children grow into teens and young adults. Due to the social pressures others place on these children, compounded by the pressures that they place on themselves, "children who have dyslexia soon come to feel that they are incapable of learning" (Redington, 1982, in Oswald, 2000). Researchers recognise that the patterns of continuous and repeated failure and frustrating experiences combined with feelings of being inferior to and different from other children will develop low self-esteem based on negative self evaluations. Over time, continued failure can erode self-esteem and affect children's personality. As a consequence of meeting repeated failures in classroom situations, they soon develop a negative attitude toward schoolwork (2000).

Because studies continually stress that high self-esteem is directly related to self-image, the ability to recognise one's personal power and thus the desire and confidence to strive for success, it is imperative that parents, educators and professionals recognise the need to build children's self-esteem through continual positive reinforcement. It is important for teachers to recognise the frustration that children feel in the classroom: an inability to express their ideas in written form; an inability to read books of interest (rather than for their reading age) and having to work considerably harder than their peers to attain the same achievement level (Thomson, 1996, in Alexandar-Passe, 2006). In the wake of this realisation and the absence of research into this area in Malaysia, there is a valid reason to initiate research into the self-esteem of children with dyslexia. Perhaps this study will provide some groundwork to initiate a similar self-esteem study back home that will benefit teachers, parents and also children.

## **2.12 Summary**

The literature review, through its scrutiny of various resources, provides evidence for the significance of studying self-esteem among children with dyslexia. Since interventions to resolve this issue is still in its infancy stage in Malaysia, it would be, therefore, be interesting to examine the scenario from the Czech context to gain better insight and understanding.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This study attempts to gain insight into the roles teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia aged 14 and 15 years in the lower secondary level in basic schools. In this chapter, I will discuss the basis and rationale for selecting the research paradigm, research design, methods of data collection, procedure of administration of instruments as well as the advantages and limitations of the methods in order to answer the central research question. I will also touch on essential related issues such as validity and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research paradigm**

The first step in any research is to decide on the educational paradigm which will help shape an inquiry. Creswell (2007) views paradigm as “a worldview comprising a set of beliefs that guide action” while Mertens (1997) defines it as “a set of philosophical assumptions that direct thinking and action”. According to Thomas Kuhn, paradigm in social science is a framework that includes assumptions about the social world and mankind, distinctive concepts, an established body of knowledge, an indication of unanswered questions or puzzles to be solved, methodology and is identified with a group of adherents or is embraced by a scientific community (Morgan, 2007).

Based on these definitions, it is my contention that to rationally guide thinking and practice, researchers should identify the worldview or paradigm that most closely approximates their own as the first step in an education research. This not only helps to shape an inquiry by providing a theoretical orientation (inductive or deductive) but also holds the key to each crucial decision taken in the research process such as the choice of methodology (qualitative, quantitative or mixed method) and data collection strategies (experiment, survey, interview or observation).

##### **3.1.1 Choice of paradigm**

Most psychologists have traditionally and extensively relied on positivist strategies to produce law-like generalisations in their practice or research to study human behaviour

(Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). They apply statistical analysis of large samples and experiments to establish cause and effect relations based on the control of selected variables. Indeed, some of the quantitative methods ascribed under the positivism paradigm are useful in terms of generating objective and validated research findings for the social science fraternity. This is evident from the numerous quantitative analyses, experimental researches, co-relational inquiries and surveys that have successfully applied structured and validated data collection instruments such as closed-ended questionnaires, rating scales, tests and behavioural responses. Robson (2002) identifies this as fixed design. Notably, these methods aim to operationalise concepts so that they can be measured and, typically, researchers employ large samples from which to generalise to the population (Gray, 2004).

However, not all social science researchers appear to readily adapt to these statistical methods. Special education needs researchers especially criticise the so-called experimental settings and how the study of large samples does little to add to their understanding of the realities of educational process in the natural settings of mainstream and special schools (Avramidis and Bret, 1999). I echo their view that the “features of experimental design are such that only rarely does the experimental setting approximate to the normal conditions of schooling to which generalisations need to be made” (1999). Nesfield-Cookson (1987) attacked the mechanistic and reductionist view of positivistic nature which he claims defines life in measurable terms rather than inner experience. Robson (2002) puts it succinctly when he says that the positivist methods cannot “capture the subtleties and complexities of individual human behaviour” as it requires the researcher to distance himself from the research and the respondent in order to gain “value-free” and “objective” data. Whereas, personal involvement of the researcher is deemed vital to take the position of the respondent and see human life as seen by people themselves. This is because “social phenomenon exists “not out there but in the minds of people and their interpretations” (Robson, 2002) and, as such, social actions and behaviours cannot be projected impartially as envisioned but only intuitively and subjectively.

For these very reasons, I choose to stray from the norm of positivist approach and instead adopt the interpretivism/constructivism paradigm to underpin the theoretical framework and methodology of my study into self-esteem of children with dyslexia. The rationale is that interpretive paradigm would allow me to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” and “look for complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories of ideas” (Creswell, 2007).

### **3.1.2 Implications of interpretivism/constructivism in current research**

Historically, interpretivism stemmed from Edmund Husserl's idea of phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of hermeneutics which denote the study of interpretive understanding or meaning (Eichelberger, 1989 in Mertens, 2005). Ontologically, the interpretivist paradigm advocates that reality is socially constructed and stresses that "multiple mental constructions can be apprehended" (Gray, 2004). Mertens (1997) adds an interesting perspective when she says that the inquirer and the inquired-into are "interlocked in an interactive process and each influences one other".

As opposed to positivists, interpretivists or constructivists clearly differ in their approach to research as the latter acknowledge that a researcher's own set of prior experiences and knowledge might enrich or add value to the research being conducted. Notably, Creswell (2007) adds that unlike positivists, interpretivists prefer to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings rather than starting with a theory" during the inquiry process.

The basic assumptions guiding the interpretive/constructivist paradigm clearly show that "knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the views of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994). In similar vein, it appears that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them. In this way, the researchers appear to "position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2007). Most prominently, interpretivism appears to place greater emphasis on the participants and their views. This reflects the many advantages and opportunities available to educational researchers to gain a deeper and broader insight into the subject matter being investigated.

By and large, the constructivist paradigm adopts a qualitative method of data collection. Qualitative research, as viewed by Creswell (2007), "is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem". One of his central insights that "the more open-ended the questioning, the better as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting" (2007:21) is appealing. This is especially important in this current research to gain deeper understanding about teachers' and students' view about self-esteem. Significantly, qualitative methods justify the assumption about social construction of reality that research can be conducted only through interaction between and among respondents and investigator (Mertens, 2005). Thus,

it explains why the researcher typically opts for a more personal, interactive mode of data collection. Notably, popular qualitative methods include interviews, observations and document analysis, which Robson calls as flexible design (2002).

This is not to suggest that quantitative methods are totally taboo under the interpretive paradigm. Creswell (2007) notes that quantitative data could be utilised to further support or “deepen” the description of qualitative data. For this reason, the current research utilises a Likert scale to measure students’ self-esteem to complement the qualitative methods of data collection.

Despite its obvious advantages, the interpretive paradigm is not without its limitations. Positivists as well as researchers who represent the critical paradigm circle often criticise interpretivists as “going too far in abandoning scientific procedures of verification and in giving up hope of discovering useful generalisations about behaviour” (Cohen et al, 2000). They argue that qualitative methods promote the use of less controlled interviews and, therefore, its accuracy is questionable. They cast doubt over the meanings of situations and the ways in which these meanings are negotiated by the actors involved. The primary concern here, therefore, seems to lie in how a researcher derives at definitions and meanings of a situation or participants’ views. This, critics argue, could seriously lead to misinterpretation and distortion of the real meaning. Therefore, caution should be taken to ensure stringent reliability and validity of data through triangulation procedure which will be discussed later.

### **3.2 Research design**

#### **3.2.1 Purpose of study**

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the beliefs and perceptions students with dyslexia have regarding their self-esteem;
2. To develop a deeper understanding about the beliefs and perceptions teachers have regarding self-esteem of students with dyslexia; and
3. To gain insight into the role teachers play in enhancing the self-esteem of students.

### **3.2.2 Research question**

To achieve the above aims, the current study evolves around the central research question of “What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?”. The following sub-questions will also be addressed:

1. What beliefs and perceptions do students have regarding their self-esteem?;
2. What beliefs and perceptions do teachers have regarding their students’ self-esteem?; and
3. What strategies do teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia?

### **3.2.3 Method of inquiry**

Based on the descriptive and exploratory nature of the research question and interpretive/constructive paradigm underpinning it, this study will employ a flexible design which subscribes to qualitative data collection methods. As Milgram (1974) suggests:

“Simplicity is the key to effective scientific inquiry. This is especially true in the case of subject matter with a psychological content. Psychological matter, by its nature, is difficult to get at and likely to have many more sides to it than appear at first glance. Complicated procedures only get in the way of clear scrutiny of the phenomenon itself.” (Milgram, 1974:10)

Patton (2002, in Mertens, 2005) also contends that “qualitative methods would be appropriate when the focus of the research is on the process, implementation or development of a programme and detailed, in-depth information is needed about certain clients or programmes”. As such, a flexible research design is appropriate for this study as it aims to get an insight into the role teachers play in improving the self-esteem of children with dyslexia. Multiple meanings and viewpoints through interviews with teachers and students will yield a rich source of data as compared to using a fixed design such as experiment or survey. I am not keen to use experiment or quasi experiment methods as prevalently used to measure self-esteem in other studies because I strongly perceive a quantitative approach will not be able to capture the nuances of complex feelings, beliefs and perceptions associated with self-esteem. I agree with Goodwin & Goodwin’s (1996) argument that qualitative approach is on par with quantitative methods as the former is also able to generate knowledge, share its findings with

the field, is rigorous and utilise credible measurement. Furthermore, given the limitation of time, accessibility and resources of this present research, it is not feasible to carry out pre- and post-tests or extensive surveys involving large samples in school settings.

#### **3.2.4 Case study approach**

Yin (2003) defines case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Meanwhile, Robson (2002) asserts that a case study is a “well-established research strategy where the focus is on a case (individual person, a group, a setting, an organisation, etc) in its own right, and taking its context into account. It typically involves multiple methods of data collection and can include quantitative data although qualitative data are almost invariably collected”. Stake (2000) goes on to suggest that case studies can prove invaluable in adding to understanding, extending experience and increasing conviction about a subject.

Taking into account the exploratory nature of this study, a multiple case study approach, which is common in psychology and social science, was considered a better choice than survey study or experiment which entails descriptive or explanatory inquiries. Furthermore, Yin (2003) suggests although most case studies adhere to the “why” and “how” type of research questions, which produce explanatory inquiry findings, the approach could also be applied to “what” question type that is the nature of this present research.

Along with these justifications, another reason to use multiple case study approach is that it would enable me to acquire in-depth and common data from various cases about the strategies employed for children with dyslexia in enhancing their self-esteem. Yin (2003) likens it to conducting multiple experiments. Furthermore, qualitative case studies are appropriate as they enable intensive and detailed study of one individual or of a group through observation and self-report (Tesch, 1990). Using smaller samples and in-depth unstructured interviews, the researchers benefit from understanding different views of a phenomenon and construct theories and models from data (inductive approach) (Gray, 2004). Gray proposes that one key advantage of this research type is that it “results in new, fuller or renewed meaning of events as it is unadulterated by the researcher’s perceptions”. It also optimises understanding of the case rather than to generalise beyond it.



By employing multiple case study involving teachers as well as students with dyslexia, multiple viewpoints could be gained leading to better understanding, thicker description and better validity of data. For these reasons, I had chosen two basic schools involving seven students and eight teachers as cases for investigation into the issue of self-esteem.

### **3.3 Setting**

As alluded to earlier, the research took place in two basic schools in Prague 5 and 6 respectively. The school in Prague 5 had 235 children with 17 teachers and staff. There were about 20 children with dyslexia in the lower secondary level (grades eight and nine). The average class size was 24 students per class. Children with dyslexia go for assessment every three years at the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre. A psychologist also visited the schools when requested to solve problems concerning students' behavioural or disciplinary issues. A teacher who has 14 years of teaching experience served as special educational needs advisor. The school did not have any special provisions for children with dyslexia such as special or mini dyslexia classes. Students in the lower secondary level also mostly did not have individualised educational plans but they were given accommodations by teachers in classrooms if necessary.

Meanwhile, the school in Prague 6 had a larger student population of 650 students with staff strength of 50. There were about 90 children with learning difficulties including dyslexia in the lower secondary level. The average number of students per class was 26. A senior teacher with some 18 years of teaching experience served as the student career and special educational needs advisor. Besides that, a psychologist from the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre also provided consultation to students with special educational needs including dyslexia depending on parents' and school's request. According to school policy, all provisions and special classes were discontinued for children with dyslexia after the age of 13 although teachers could use their discretion to provide accommodations in classrooms.

The rationale to use mainstream rather than special schools in the present study was to align closely with the objective of this study that was to examine self-esteem among students in an inclusive setting. Czech basic schools also corresponded closely with the integrated school setting in Malaysia where most children with dyslexia were supported in regular classrooms. The timeline of study was from April to August, 2008.

### **3.4 Sampling strategy**

Participants in this study included seven students with dyslexia in age group of 14 to 15 years and eight regular classroom and subject teachers who taught children with dyslexia in integrated classroom settings in mainstream schools. This purposive sampling strategy was a feature of qualitative research and chosen on the basis of possession of particular characteristics and experience or professional knowledge about a topic being examined (Cohen et al, 2007). For example, the teachers were selected because they had professional knowledge, experience and skills in dealing with issues related to dyslexia such as self-esteem. The students were identified by remedial teachers based on the criteria of diagnosis of dyslexia and matching age group. It served no purpose to seek a random sample when most of the participants might be ignorant of these issues and unable to comment on matters of relevance to the study.

The age group of students between 14 and 15 years corresponded with most studies of self-esteem involving adolescents. The rationale to choose students in this age bracket was that they could articulate better and provide a clearer picture of their experiences of having dyslexia and its effect on their self-esteem compared to younger children in the primary level.

### **3.5 Techniques of data collection**

As mentioned earlier, data was collected from two sources: teachers and students. Opinions from teachers were gathered via semi-structured interviews. Data collection procedure for students started with an analysis of documents comprising students' diagnosis reports from Psychological Educational Counseling Centre to get some background knowledge of students' diagnosis and literacy details. Next, viewpoints of students were obtained using multi-method approach in the following sequence: Three Magic Wishes Task, Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task, semi-structured interview and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to measure level of self-esteem. The rationale to use this sequence was to provide as much as comfort to students as possible. The Three Magic Wishes Task and Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task provided some "warming-up" for students before the more intricate and complex questioning regarding their self-esteem during the semi-structured interview sessions. Since the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale contained some sensitive and negatively worded statements, it was deemed appropriate to administer it at the end of interview session. Giving it in the beginning of the session might have affected the students' state of mind.



### 3.5.1 Analysis of documents

A common approach to documentary analysis is content analysis, which denotes the quantitative analysis of what is in the document. Content analysis is defined by Krippendorff (1980, in Robson 2002) as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context”. Described as indirect and unobtrusive means of data collection, this method entails dealing with something produced for some other purpose than the research (2002). It is unobtrusive in that the document is not affected by the fact that the researcher is using it.

Content analysis also serves as a supplementary or secondary method in a multi-method study and for triangulation purpose. Particular contexts generate specific types of document. For example, studies involving schools or other educational establishments might include written curricula, course outlines, other course documents, timetables, notices, letters and communications to parents.

For this study, assessment reports from the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre were scrutinised to extract data about students with dyslexia. Data from these reports contained details about diagnosis of learning difficulties, literacy problems and recommendations for interventions at school and home. Criteria used for evaluating the quality of documents as outlined by Bryman (2004) included credibility, authenticity, representativeness and meaning.

An advantage of content analysis is that the data is permanent and hence can be subject to re-analysis when the need arises, allowing reliability checks and replication studies. However, a common limitation is that the documents may be limited or partial and may have been written for some purpose other than for the research, and it is difficult or impossible to allow the biases and distortions that this introduces (Robson, 2002).

#### ***Procedure:***

*Since the reports were in Czech, a teacher who serves as special educational needs advisor read out the contents while the research took relevant notes.*

### 3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Gray (2007) succinctly suggests that interview is the most logical research method if the objective of the research is largely exploratory, involving examination of feelings or attitudes.

Merriam (1998), meanwhile, describes interviews as “a conversation with a purpose, a person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another”. The rationale for using interviews for this study as compared to questionnaire or survey is that it is a “flexible and adaptable way of finding things out” (Robson, 2002). Gray (2007) contends that face to face interviews also allow one to “modify line of enquiry, follow up interesting responses and investigate underlying motives” in way that other methods such as questionnaires could not achieve. Questionnaires arguably could be close- or open-ended, complex and the logical order of questions is difficult to predetermine (Gray, 2007). Of the many types of interviews – semi-structured, non-directive, focused and informal conversation – I chose semi-structured interviews for this study as it allows one to investigate for more detailed responses where the respondent could be asked to clarify their views and opinion, and expand on their answers. This is especially important when soliciting viewpoints about self-esteem from young students as they would be required to delve on their complex feelings and inner thoughts.

Furthermore, since this study subscribes to the interpretive paradigm, various viewpoints and meanings could be derived. Therefore, semi-structured interviews, guided by a list of questions, are most suitable and helpful to clear any conflict or misunderstandings and interestingly could produce unexpected answers especially from students. Arksey & Knight (1999, in Cohen, 2007) propose that it is important to “understand the world of children through their own eyes rather than the lens of adults” as children differ in cognitive, linguistic development, attention and concentration span, ability to recall, life experiences, what they consider to be important, status and power. Therefore, it is important that care is taken to ask age-relevant questions, allow children time to think about answers and to combine various methods in interview such as semi-projective tasks to elicit information in a creative manner and to avoid distraction, boredom and uneasiness.

A caveat in using interview method though is that it could be time-consuming and require intensive preparation and skills (Robson, 2002). Yin (1994) also warns of danger of bias due to poorly constructed questions, response bias or inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity in that interviewer gives what the researcher wants to hear (Yin, 1994 in Gray, 2007). However, given careful planning and consideration, these limitations could be overcome to yield rich qualitative data and insights interviews are able to generate.

### ***Procedure for students:***

*Consent forms were distributed to parents to seek approval for their children's participation in the study (see Appendix A for sample consent form). Students' interview questions were formulated comprising 17 open-ended questions regarding their family background, interest and perceptions about school, teachers and peers, including their self-esteem (see Appendix B and C for sample interview questions in English and Czech respectively). Interview questions were perused by the respective school principals, special educational needs advisors and parents for approval in both schools. All interviews were held during school hours. The special educational needs advisor (with more than 14 years of teaching experience) helped to translate for students at the school in Prague 5. An English teacher with more than five years of teaching experience translated for students at the school in Prague 6. Confidentiality was assured with regard to personal opinions expressed and consent was obtained prior to tape recording the sessions. A teacher was present during interviews at Prague 6 school as per parents' request. Salient points were double-checked and verified with students after end of each interview session.*

### ***Procedure for teachers:***

*Interview questions for teachers were divided into sub sections such as teachers' background and qualifications; teacher-student relationship; and strategies to enhance self-esteem (see Appendix D and E for sample interview questions in English and Czech respectively). Interview questions were distributed to teachers a week prior to the interview sessions. Interviews were held in schools for about 30 to 40 minutes per session depending on teachers' time schedule. Translators were provided where requested by teachers. Confidentiality was assured with regard to personal opinions expressed and consent was obtained prior to tape recording the sessions. Salient points were double-checked and verified with teacher after end of each interview session.*

### **3.5.3 Three Magic Wishes Task**

This semi-projective task was replicated from a study conducted by E. Dykens and colleagues in 2007 at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Centre for Research on Human Development, Vanderbilt University, in the United States. The study measured the self-perceptions, thoughts, hopes and inner lives of 128 participants with intellectual disabilities (ID) aged five to 50 years

(mean age:18.75 years) using the Three Magic Wishes Task. Using a systematic and reliable coding system, the researchers revealed a diverse range of positive and negative self-appraisals among participants derived from 19 themes or categories of wishes.

The rationale to use semi-projective tasks is that it may provide persons with ID with just enough structure or cues to convey their self-perceptions in a spontaneous and unbiased manner. In contrast to impoverished, concrete and non-informative nature of projective tests or standardised tests prevalent in most researches on self-perceptions, the more structured and open-ended semi-projective techniques are proven to permit a wide range of responses (Dykens, 2007). Notably, this study is the first to demonstrate the feasibility and reliability of semi-projective techniques to be used in clinical or applied settings. Ultimately, these semi-projective tasks may stimulate a more focused line of research on the self-perceptions and emotional vulnerabilities of persons with ID, as well as their strengths, hopes, wishes, dreams and passions (2007).

In selecting the Three Magic Wishes Task for the present study, I rationalise that the same objectives could be applied successfully to children with dyslexia. Wishes could be used as powerful clues into the emotional lives of students with dyslexia and served as a non-threatening way to learn about their sense of global self-esteem related to school life. This task was further strengthened and triangulated with the use of a self-esteem measurement scale that was lacking in Dykens' study. The line of questioning for the present study, however, was modified from the original to limit the three wishes to pertain to school experience to help students narrow down the broad focus of this task.

#### ***Procedure:***

*Each student was asked for three wishes relating to their expectations of school life: "If you could have three magic wishes that could come true in school, what would you wish for? What are your three wishes? I will write them down." (Original question: "If you could have three magic wishes that could come true, what would you wish for? What are your three wishes?") (See Appendix F for sample test of Three Magic Wishes Task.)*

#### **3.5.4 Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task**

One element of the interview for students was a request for each student to construct a mind picture or image of what dyslexia presented to him or her. This qualitative method was

replicated from an intensive study carried out into the self-concepts of 50 pupils with dyslexia in a special school setting (Burden & Burdett, 2005). The results showed a number of powerful images illustrating both surmountable and insurmountable barriers to learning together with feelings of confusion and inadequacy. The study concluded that metaphors provided a potentially helpful means of exploring the deep-rooted thoughts and feelings of children with dyslexia. Although the use of metaphor was uncommon in the field of dyslexia studies, it was deemed useful to allow individuals with dyslexia struggling to overcome their literacy difficulties to narrate accounts of their life histories. Stard (1998, in Burden, 2005) suggested one way to explore fundamental, primary level of thinking and feeling about learning was to dig out the metaphors that underlie spontaneous everyday conceptions and scientific theorising. It was the intention of the present study to make the starting point of an investigation into the use of metaphor by students with dyslexia in the Czech context. A big advantage of this method was that it helped to alleviate the dry nature of some of the interview questions as well as to complement the numerical data collected (Burden, 2005). Since there was little literature on this subject, it was not known if it had any limitations other than initial concerns about validity and reliability.

#### ***Procedure:***

*With the help of a translator, each student was asked the following question: "If you were to imagine dyslexia as some kind of "thing" or picture in your mind, how would you describe it?" The question was repeated if necessary but no examples or clues were given so as not to mislead students. No time limit was set for the task. (See Appendix G for sample test of Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task.)*

#### **3.5.5 Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale**

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) is a 10-item uni-dimensional scale designed to measure the level of self-esteem of children and adults (Hargbog, 2006). It aims to measure elements such as personal worth, self-confidence, self-satisfaction, self-respect and self-deprecation. It employs a four point Likert-type format of response from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Five items are worded positively (for example statement three says "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") and five items are worded negatively (for example statement six states "I certainly feel useless at times"). Scoring involves a method of combined ratings. Low self-esteem responses are "disagree" or "strongly disagree" on items

1, 3, 4, 7, 10, and “strongly agree” or “agree” on items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9. The scale can be scored by totalling the individual four-point items after reverse-scoring the negatively worded items (2006).

Although literature shows a gap of studies involving students with dyslexia using the RSE scale, most psychological studies on self-esteem across a range of age group including adolescents have successfully and extensively applied this scale to measure self-esteem. This justifies the rationale to use the scale for the present study considering its validity and reliability.

***Procedure:***

*Each student was given a copy of the test translated in Czech and informed about its purpose and procedure. The 10 statements in the test were read out one by one with help of translator. The students responded according to the following Likert scale: 1: Strongly agree 2: Agree 3: Disagree 4: Strongly disagree. (See Appendix H and I for sample of Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in English and Czech respectively.)*

**3.6 Procedure for data analysis**

Data analysis in a qualitative research such as this multiple case study “occurs throughout the data collection process” (Stainback and Stainback, 1988) and is “systematic and comprehensive but not rigid” (Tesch, 1990 in Mertens, 2005). The data drawn from semi-structured interviews, document analysis and semi-projective tasks was analysed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994 in Robson, 2002) guideline as follows:

1. Give codes to first set of field notes drawn from interviews or document reviews;
2. Note personal reflections or other comments in the margin;
3. Sort and sift through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups and common sequences;
4. Identity these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences;
5. Elaborate a small set of generalisations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database; and
6. Examine those generalisations in light of a formalised body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.



The process of data collection and analysis was continued until regularities emerged. The coding and patterns derived were closely matched with the central and sub research questions. Common criticisms of coding, however, according to Bryman (2004) are:

- Coding risks losing the context of what is said; and
- The narrative flow of what participants say is lost.

### **3.7 Validity**

Often, validity and reliability is considered a “threat” to qualitative study due to lack of standardisation (Robson, 2002). However, the use of multiple methods in this study such as semi-structured interviews, document analysis and semi-projective tasks contributed to validity as they permitted triangulation of methods and data. Cohen et al (2007) defines triangulation as the “use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour”. Furthermore, data was derived from two sources namely students and teachers which strengthened the level of validity. The use of multiple methods, or the multi-method approach as it is sometimes called, attempt to map out or explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that triangulation is intended as a check on data while member checking and elements of credibility are to be used as a check on members’ constructions of data.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the interviews form the essence of ethics (Klave, 1996 in Cohen 2000). With these guiding principles, the following ethical considerations were strictly followed in the course of this study:

- To inform and obtain consent from participants such as students (parental approval) and teachers (school approval) to participate in study;
- To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of participants at all times; and
- Not to coerce students into participating or answering questions, therefore, respecting their right to reveal personal details pertaining to feelings, perceptions and beliefs about self-esteem at their own free will and choice.

### **3.9 Limitations**

Since this was a small-scale research within a limited time period, it was not possible to select a large sample for purpose of generalisation or standardisation. Therefore, the comprehensive study of teachers' role in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia across several schools was not feasible. Only two schools were able to co-operate in this study. Another limitation was the language where interviews with teachers and students were conducted via translators. A caveat would be that some nuances of the interview could be lost in the process. This is especially glaring in the "Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor" task for students where it could have more valid and meaningful if I could understand the students' narration of their difficulties. Translations may pose a problem as meanings could be misinterpreted and, therefore, careful interpretation and "member checking" (Robson, 2002) for validity was important.

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter discussed how the perspectives of students and teachers regarding the issue of self-esteem were obtained using qualitative methods which conformed to the interpretive/constructive framework that underpinned this study. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and semi-projective tasks served as primary data collection tools in this multiple case study.



## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### **4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of the rich qualitative data collected from two sample sources namely students and teachers in two basic schools in Prague, the Czech Republic. As Cohen (2007) suggests, qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data and making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. There is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data. Therefore, one abides by the rule of "fitness for purpose" which means the researcher must be clear about what he or she wants the data analysis to achieve as this will determine the kind of analysis that is undertaken. With this principle in mind, I organised and displayed my data according to the research questions of this study as stipulated in the methodology section earlier. Data was analysed under these sub research questions:

- 1 What beliefs and perceptions do students with dyslexia have regarding their self-esteem?;
- 2 What beliefs and perceptions do teachers have regarding their students' self-esteem?; and
- 3 What strategies do teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia?

The rationale is that the emerging themes from patterns and regularities observed from evidence and data collected via semi-structured interviews, document analysis, semi-projective task and self-esteem measurement scale will help answer the central research question of "What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?".

#### **4.1 Sample characteristics**

Prior to attempting to answer the research questions, it is vital to first present the sample characteristics of the students and teachers who participated in this study.

#### 4.1.1 Sample characteristics of students

Consent forms together with sample interview questions were sent out to 10 parents of students with dyslexia from two basic schools in Prague to get approval for their children to participate in the study. Nine parents gave their consent. However, two students from Prague 6 were absent on the day interview sessions were scheduled and finally had to be withdrawn from the study due to data collection deadline and school holidays. The case study proceeded with the remaining seven students namely five boys and two girls between the ages of 14 and 15. The sample characteristics for students are presented in Table 1. Student A, Student B, Student C and Student D were from the basic school in Prague 5 while Student E, Student F, and Student G were from the basic school in Prague 6. All students were in grade eight except for Student A, Student B and Student C who were in grade nine. The order of birth for each of these students is also presented in Table 1. Most students were reported to have one to two siblings except for Student G who had eight siblings from parents' previous marriages. He had two siblings of his own - a younger brother aged 13 years and a 17 year old sister.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Students							
	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
Sex	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age	15	15	15	14	14	14	14
Grade	9	9	9	8	8	8	8
Order of Birth	Second	Second	Second (twins)	Eldest	Second	Eldest	Second
Number of siblings in family	2; older brother 19 years	2; older sister 25 years	3; her twin sister and older sister 18 years	2; brother 10 years	2; brother 18 years	3; brother 10 years, sister 4 years, sister 3 months	8; (age range: 13 – 32 years)

#### 4.1.2 Sample characteristics of teachers

The sample characteristics for teachers are presented in Table 2. All but one of the respondents were female. Their age range was from 26 to 50 years old. Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C and Teacher D were from the basic school in Prague 5 while the rest were from the school in Prague 6. All teachers had university level academic qualification. Three

teachers had less than five years of teaching experience while Teacher E and Teacher F reported 14 and 18 years of teaching experience respectively. Teacher A, Teacher E and Teacher F held senior positions as special educational needs advisors and specialist teachers in their schools and had vast experience dealing with students with dyslexia. Except for Teacher C, Teacher G and Teacher H, who were class teachers, the rest taught individual subjects including English, Maths and Czech language. All teachers taught grades eight and nine (students aged between 14 and 15) and had experience teaching at least one of the seven students who participated in this study. All teachers had neither prior experience of teaching in special school nor formal training in special education. Majority of them developed their professional knowledge about dyslexia mostly through reading books, attending seminars and consulting colleagues indicating their self-interest in pursuing knowledge in this field.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics of Teachers

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F	Teacher G	Teacher H
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	30s	26	33	37	50	35	29	27
Education	University level	University level	University level	University level	University level	University level	University level	University level
Years of teaching	14	2	7	2	18	6	6	3
Role in school	Subject teacher: Czech, History, music and computer; special needs advisor; specialist teacher	Subject teacher: English and Czech	Class teacher (Grades 8 & 9) and subject teacher: Maths and Physics	Subject teacher: English	Subject teacher: English and Biology; special needs advisor, student career advisor; specialist teacher	Subject teacher: Czech, Geography and social studies; special needs advisor for elementary level; specialist teacher	Class teacher (Grades 8 & 9); subject teacher: Czech, English, Civics and Education for Healthy Living	Class teacher (Grades 8 & 9); subject teacher: Czech and History
Knowledge about dyslexia	Books, Internet, consults experts	Consults colleagues, books, Internet	Books, Internet, seminar	Seminar	Seminar, Internet	Module on dyslexia at university, seminar	Module on dyslexia at university; seminar, books, colleagues	Books, seminar, consults colleagues

## 4.2 Data from document analysis

A scrutiny of diagnosis reports from the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre resulted in better understanding of student's prevalent learning difficulties and implications on academic and emotional needs. The problem encountered in this process, though, was that one of the schools had rather strict policy on preserving confidentiality of students' records.

Furthermore, parents did not grant approval for scrutiny of their children's medical and diagnosis details. As a result, details for three students in that school could not be obtained other than a general description of their diagnosis from the special educational needs advisor. As for the rest of the students, the special educational needs advisor read out the contents while I took down salient points. Notably, the advisor pointed out that none of the students had individualised education plan since they were considered to be in the milder category of dyslexia and could follow the regular curriculum in school. The document analysis of each student is presented as follows:

#### **4.2.1 Student A**

Reports showed that Student A was first diagnosed in 2000 when he was seven years old as having mild dyslexia with a combination of dysorthographia. Described as having severe level of dyslexia, he had difficulty especially in Maths where he could not count beyond 10. He had considerable difficulty in reading. The recommendations from the psychologist included allowing more time to complete tasks in school. A discussion was held with his mother and special educator on strategies to cope with his learning problems at home.

The following diagnosis in 2005 at age 12 showed an improvement in his condition. He was described as still having "dyslexic" problems. Although he still read slowly, he could comprehend the text better. Reports showed he still made grammatical errors (for example, he knew how sentences should be structured but produced wrong answers when he wrote the sentences down). However, he was able to concentrate better and this success was attributed to his mother who provided good support at home with help of a special educator.

Recommendations for school included avoiding using dictation for Czech language and allowing more time to finish written tasks. The report did not mention any emotional problems arising as a result of his diagnosis indicating that he was coping well with his academic and emotional needs.

#### **4.2.2 Student B**

Student B's earlier diagnosis in 2000 at age seven showed that he had Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. He had short attention span and was very hyperactive. Recommendations for remedial support included engaging in special exercises using biofeedback method - a commercial therapy method where a battery of brain stimulation

games was played on computer. The computer reportedly measured brain activity while the game was being played.

The second diagnosis two years later in 2002 showed that he had mild dyslexia with a combination of dysgraphia and dyspraxia. He was still reported to be hyperactive. He read slowly and had poor concentration. Teachers were recommended to use more oral assessment instead of written tests. He also continued with biofeedback therapy for his hyperactive tendencies.

The latest diagnosis in year 2005 showed the same diagnosis of dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyspraxia. He still read slowly and had poor concentration. He “double read” especially Czech language. It was recommended to continue using oral assessment and reduce dictation and written work. His teacher said he had made remarkable improvement in his behaviour and did not display hyperactive tendencies. However, he was reported to disturb or distract his classmates and appeared disinterested or refused to complete his tasks at times. Otherwise, he was quiet, well mannered and could concentrate on his work. On a positive note, his English language teacher commented that Student B was especially proficient in English and could produce very good short stories.

#### **4.2.3 Student C**

Diagnosed with severe dyslexia and dysorthographia at age 11 in 2004, Student C was described as a very slow reader. She could not comprehend the text she was reading at most times. Her written work was poor. Although the quality of her written work indicated the symptoms of dyspraxia, she was not officially assessed for diagnosis. Reports indicated that she had low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Teachers were recommended to disregard specific grammatical errors in her written work but instead to pay more attention to oral assessment. She needed to be motivated in class and encouraged to focus on her strengths in non-academic activities. Additionally, the special educational needs advisor pointed out that perhaps her low self-esteem could stem from her more dominant and bright twin sister who had no diagnosis of dyslexia. However, she described Student C as being friendly, active in sports and well mannered. She was also reported to be a hardworking pupil.

#### **4.2.4 Student D**

Student D's first diagnosis in 2002 at age nine described him as having severe dyslexia and dysorthographia. Reports indicated he made lots of repetition when reading and left out letters in written work. He had major problems with Czech language and Maths. Besides that, his comprehension was poor and he also had orientation difficulties. It was recommended that he received extra help with comprehension in school besides not being assessed for specific grammatical errors in written work. His parents were consulted regarding strategies for remediation.

The second assessment in 2003 did not show much improvement with the psychologist suggesting continuation of remedial work. In 2005, assessment indicated a slight improvement although he still read slowly and had poor concentration. He still made grammatical errors and could not comprehend the text he read. Teachers were recommended to use oral assessment for tests and lessons. The last diagnosis in April 2008 showed the repetition of the problems and recommendations. An improvement was that although he still read slowly, now he was able to understand the content better. His parents were advised to work closely with school to solve his difficulties as there were concerns that it could lead to emotional and behavioural problems as he grew older.

The special educational needs advisor pointed out that despite his severe level of dyslexia, Student D had prowess for handwork and was quite communicative compared to other students with dyslexia. Additionally, he commented that Student D also appeared to be quite popular among his friends and was friendly with teachers.

#### **4.2.5 Student E, Student F and Student G**

Since access to the above students' records was denied, it was not possible to produce a full description of their diagnosis. The special educational needs advisor confirmed based on psychological reports that all the students had been assessed and diagnosed for dyslexia at the Psychological Educational Counseling Centre in Prague. The first diagnosis was carried out between the age of seven and eight. Their degree of dyslexia was considered mild. Their last assessment was conducted between the year 2005 and 2006. None of the students had individualised education plans as according to school policy, support for students with



dyslexia was discontinued after the age of 13 although teachers could still provide accommodations and modifications if necessary in classrooms.

In summary, the document analysis confirmed that all students in the study had some degree of mild dyslexia although none of the students were reported to have any severe behavioural or emotional problems resulting from it. Indication of low self-esteem only emerged in Student C's report. However, the fact that all students had problems with their literacy skills naturally pointed to some indication of its effect on self-esteem which will be further substantiated and evidenced through other methods of investigation in this study.

#### **4.3 Data for first sub research question: What beliefs and perceptions do students with dyslexia have regarding their self-esteem?**

To answer the above sub research question, data was collected using four methods: Three Magic Wishes Task, Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task, semi-structured interview and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Measurement Scale. The evidence collected through each method is presented as follows:

##### **4.3.1 Data from Three Magic Wishes Task**

Each of the seven students was asked for three wishes relating to their expectations of school life as follows: "If you could have three magic wishes that could come true in school, what would you wish for? What are your three magic wishes? I will write them down."

All students responded with a variety of wishes each except for Student B and Student E who had only one primary wish. Content analyses were conducted by generating a list of individual responses (*See Appendix J for complete list of students' responses*). Then, broader categories of codes were derived from the responses as summarised in Table 3 along with their examples of responses. A total of 17 wishes were categorised into five codes. Most of the codes were self-explanatory and, therefore, required no further clarification.

<b>Table 3: Content Codes and Examples of Responses for Three Magic Wishes Task</b>	
<b>Codes</b>	<b>Examples of responses</b>
Academic aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. To obtain good marks for History, Czech and Maths</li> <li>. To make it successfully to next level of school (higher secondary level)</li> <li>. To know everything without having to study</li> <li>. Not to be stressed before exams</li> </ul>



Physical needs/facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. To give school a fresh coat of paint</li> <li>. To repair the windows in school</li> <li>. To receive better quality textbooks for all subjects</li> </ul>
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. To complete schooling but to maintain friendship with friends</li> <li>. To gain more respect from friends and teachers in class</li> </ul>
Learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. To have a more relaxed, fun and informal way of learning</li> <li>. To have more practical work than theory</li> <li>. To have shorter hours for subjects and school</li> <li>. To start school at later hours</li> <li>. To have better teachers</li> </ul>
Sense of security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Not to change schools ever</li> <li>. Hope everything will remain the same in school</li> </ul>

In reviewing the five codes, it appeared that most students had wishes pertaining to learning environment and academic aspiration. Some students had more practical wishes relating to studies such as *"I wish to obtain good marks for History, Czech and Maths"* (Student A) and *"I wish to make it successfully to next level of school (higher secondary level)"* (Student G). Whereas others had not so tangible wishes such as *"I wish to know everything without having to study"* (Student C). A direct reference to self-esteem was made by one student who said: *"I wish to gain more respect from friends and teachers in class"* (Student A). Meanwhile, Student A also indicated his anxiety level by wishing for less stressful atmosphere during exams. Student E expressed her wish for a better learning environment in this way: *"School is very disciplined...a more relaxed and informal way of teaching and fun learning environment could be better. I prefer an informal way of learning in school...do away with rigid, strict and one-way communicative teaching approach...make it interesting and fun. I want to know why I am learning the subject and how it can apply in practical life instead of learning something that I do not understand."*

Only one student wished for better teachers. Some students had a great sense of security about the school and did not wish for any change to happen and wanted to study forever in the school.

Overall, the responses indicated students' range of positive and negative self-perceptions and appraisals regarding their school. Majority of students expressed more positive appraisal by wishing for improvement in school such as better teachers, shorter school hours, more

practical work, facilities (new books and windows, etc) and fun teaching approach which would help create a more conducive and positive learning environment in school. Notably, none of them had any extreme perceptions or negative thoughts about their school.

#### 4.3.2 Data from Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task

For this task, each student was asked the following question: "If you were to imagine dyslexia as some kind of "thing" or picture in your mind, how would you describe it?" Six students responded with metaphors that reflected their personality, creativity and self-perceptions about dyslexia. Only one student did not have any idea and could not conjure a metaphor. However, he explained that he knew and understood what dyslexia was and said it did not pose a major problem for him. The impressive range of responses gathered from the six students is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Responses for Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task	
Student A	I imagine dyslexia as a very nice picture with many bright colours. When others look at it, they can see the clear boundaries of bright colours but for me, the boundaries are blurred. It is a blurred vision.
Student B	I imagine dyslexia as someone sitting at a table trying to read a book but at the same time, the person is wishing he could be elsewhere doing something else.
Student C	I imagine dyslexia as a very difficult test that I have to sit for. Although I think I know the answers to the test questions, I just don't know how to do it.
Student D	<i>Did not conjure any metaphor.</i>
Student E	I imagine dyslexia as a painter who does things creatively and imaginatively; He paints a man as wearing lawn (green grass) instead of a shield or a blanket. I see that dyslexia is about misplacing things. If I can't change it, I might as well look at it in a positive way.
Student F	I imagine dyslexia as a deep, black hole. It is negative and something to do with not being able to concentrate.
Student G	I imagine dyslexia as a spider or parasite. It may not necessarily be a bad thing. It can be looked at positively and can be changed. I think I can change it.

The analysis of the metaphors followed the guidelines used in the study by Burden and Burdett (2005) by means of a domain analysis. Metaphors were categorised according to patterns that emerged in terms of surmountable or insurmountable barriers or obstacles. Surmountable barriers were more positive in outlook while insurmountable barriers had a more negative perspective. A critical friend who was a colleague in the Erasmus Mundus

course helped construct meanings from the metaphors. This facilitated member checking and verification of data.

Majority of students' metaphors corresponded to some form of obstacle or barrier that intervened with their learning process. While some metaphors were relatively simple, others were complicated and required further explanation from students.

#### **4.3.2.1 Surmountable barriers**

Most of the metaphors generated in this category described dyslexia in terms of barriers that could be surmounted. This indicated that students in this category had a more positive outlook of their difficulties and high sense of internal locus of control and no feelings of learnt helplessness closely linked with self-esteem (Burden & Burdett, 2005).

Some metaphors in this category were creative and very graphical. For example, Student A described dyslexia as: *"A very nice picture which is very colourful with many bright colours. When others look at it, they can see the clear boundaries of bright colours but for me, the boundaries are blurred. It is a blurred vision."* Although there is a sense of confusion and lack of understanding, the bright colours indicated that Student A might be looking at dyslexia in a positive way with hope of improvement once the blurred vision becomes explicit and clear.

Student E, who is very articulate, saw dyslexia in an impressively creative, mature and positive way: *"I see dyslexia as a painter who does things creatively and imaginatively. He paints a man as wearing lawn (green grass) instead of a shield or a blanket. I see that dyslexia is about misplacing things. If I can't change it, I might as well look at it in a positive way."* The metaphor reflected her personality as she described herself to be fun and creative.

Sometimes the metaphors appeared to be negative but students had a more positive and optimistic perspective about it. For example, Student G said: *"I imagine dyslexia as a spider or parasite. It may not necessarily be a bad thing. It can be looked at positively and can be changed. I think I can change it."*

#### **4.3.2.2 Insurmountable barriers**

In this category, students described metaphors that mostly projected negative feelings, a sense of powerlessness, a sense of isolation, confusion, low degree of internal locus of control and

high degree of learnt helplessness. Burden and Burdett (2005) termed these negative feelings as emotional reactions. Metaphors in this category tend to be more personalised.

For example, Student B offered a more personalised reaction in describing about dyslexia that indicated a sense of isolation and powerlessness as followed: *"...it is like someone sitting at a table trying to read a book but at the same time, the person is wishing he could be elsewhere doing something else."*

Similarly, Student C described dyslexia in a personalised and more emotionally laden manner that perhaps manifested her own difficulties in school. *"I imagine dyslexia as a very difficult test that I have to sit for. Although I think I know the answers to the test questions, I just don't know how to do it."*

Meanwhile, only one metaphor came across as projecting strong negative feelings and an acute sense of learnt helplessness, despair and powerlessness. Student F imagined dyslexia *"as a deep, black hole. It is negative and something to do with not being able to concentrate."*

Overall, the metaphors in the surmountable barriers category indicated that half of the students had a high sense of positive outlook about their learning problems. They had a clear perception about their dyslexia but did not see it as a hindrance to their learning. This also indicated that these students had less learnt helplessness and projected a high level of internal locus of control. The metaphors also showed that students were more acceptable of their learning problem and could cope with the difficulties it posed. In contrast, the metaphors in the insurmountable category showed that students had to some degree a sense of negative self-perception and higher learnt helplessness. They tend to see dyslexia as a barrier that hindered their learning outcomes.

#### **4.3.3 Data from semi-structured interviews**

Data was obtained from students' semi-structured interview sessions which comprised 17 open-ended questions regarding their family background, interest and perceptions about school, teachers and peers that indicated their self-esteem. The emerging patterns from data were summarised into six broad categories or themes namely self-perception/interests, perception about school, perception about teachers, perception about peers and perception

about future goals (*see Appendix K for a sample transcription of semi-structured interview for students*).

#### **4.3.3.1 Self-perception/interests**

On personal strengths, most students described themselves as being nice or good. Three students could state further as being honest, friendly and positive. Overall, students were shy and hesitant to talk about their strengths and a few students pointed out that it was not the Czech culture to talk about one's positive attributes.

All the seven students agreed that they led an active lifestyle. They reported having a hobby or interest that they pursued actively with friends or individually after school hours such as dancing, trekking, cycling, listening to music, playing football and swimming. At least two students took up dancing professionally. Student C had been step dancing for 11 years while Student E had been involved in modern dance for three years. Both students were part of dance troupes that performed regularly on stage. They also had formal training in dancing every week. However, both students could not pinpoint if professional dancing had any effect on their self-esteem. Student G reportedly played football for his school and village teams. Interestingly, Student F displayed a passion for cooking and intended to pursue it professionally. Meanwhile, Student D enjoyed handwork and repairing motorcycles. He was also part of a hip hop dancing group and had regular street performances. He also joined the hip hop dancing club in school.

The data in this section indicated the students' close interaction and relationship with peers as was the norm with adolescents aged 14 and 15 years. Notably, apart from two students, majority of them did not appear to be interested to take part in school clubs or extra-curricular activities.

#### **4.3.3.2 Perception about school**

Majority of students indicated that they liked school very much. On what they enjoyed most about school, a variety of responses were received such as approachable teachers, good friends and break times. Interestingly, Student F said he enjoyed the kitchen area since he was very passionate about cooking. Three students, including the two girls, mentioned that they enjoyed the break times since they could spend time with friends in the hallway.

Student A said teachers were the best thing about school. He said: *"What I enjoy most about school are the teachers in the schools. I like the approach they use to teach. They are also friendly. I think they are knowledgeable and approachable."*

At least two students said they enjoyed having friends the most in school. Student F said: *"I really enjoy their company and spend a lot of time with them. We can learn a lot from each other... sometimes they also help me cope in school."* (He had transferred to the present school a year ago.)

In contrast, majority of students mentioned long hours, lousy meals in canteen and difficulties in Chemistry and Czech (especially written work) as the least enjoyed part about school.

On long hours, Student F had this to say: *"The hours are very long. Afternoon school stretches to 3.30pm. The school environment and teachers can be more relaxed. Compared to the former school which was quite relaxed, there is more work here but I can learn more."*

Despite that, all students unanimously said that they were satisfied with their school and did not want to change anything about it. Student A said: *"I have been in the school since nine years old... I would not like to change anything. Everything is all right; there are no major problems in this school."*

All students also said they did not encounter major problems such as bullying or teasing in school. However, all of them agreed that they had to try harder than their peers to learn certain subjects with majority citing Czech language and Chemistry as being very difficult subjects. Some received extra support after school hours from teachers or had private tuition or help from siblings at home.

#### **4.3.3.3 Perception about peers**

Data showed that all students had good relationship with friends both in and outside school. Some of them had more friends in school. For example, Student D mentioned that he had more than 20 friends in school. The male students mostly went for sports activities with their friends. For example, Student G said: *"Yes, I have more friends in school than in the village. But I also spend time with village football team who come from other villages; we play friendly matches besides training or watch games together."*



Some students were closer to friends outside school. Students who took up dancing mentioned they were closer to their dance troupe members. For example, Student E said: *"I am more open to discussing my problems with my dancing troupe friends than friends in school. There are 15 in the group and I am close to 12 of them. They are all my age group - 14."*

Meanwhile, Student D said he enjoyed the company of his hip hop dancing group members very much and spent most of his time with them.

#### **4.3.3.4 Perception about collaborative learning**

Majority of students enjoyed group activities that involved working with friends and classmates during lessons. They said it was better than studying alone and they could learn from other students. Some students said it depended on subject and whom they were working with. However, Student D had mixed feelings about group work: *"Yes, I like working in group very much as everyone knows something and can share and discuss about it together; but sometimes if you study alone, you can learn more as there are bound to be disagreements with each other (during group work). It is better to learn Czech and English in group."* Student C mentioned that group work was sometimes not taken seriously as students detracted from tasks given by teacher and *"start chatting about other things"*.

#### **4.3.3.5 Perception about teachers**

On their relationship with teachers, majority of the students had good impression of their teachers. All of them said teachers understood their problems with studies and tried to help. Some of the students sometimes approached their teachers for assistance with lessons such as Czech or Chemistry. Some students had particular teachers whom they turned to more for help because they were friendly and approachable. For example, Student A said: *"Yes, I like three teachers especially the Biology teacher who is friendly and explains problems regarding studies very well."*

However, apart from one student, majority of them did not discuss their personal problems with teachers. Majority preferred to talk to their parents or siblings. Most of them also talked to friends about personal problems. Student E said: *"It depends on subjects and teachers teaching it. I will approach teachers about Czech language... I don't discuss personal problems with teachers. I am more open to discussing my problems with my dancing troupe"*



*friends than friends in school.*” Only one student said he did not approach teachers at all even about studies. He had transferred to the school a year ago and depended mainly on friends for help.

#### 4.3.3.6 Perception about future goals

All students had intentions of pursuing their studies to either high school or specialised training schools such as business or agricultural schools. Student F wanted to be a successful chef while two others expressed wish to be carpenters as they liked handwork. Some students found inspiration in their older siblings and wanted to follow in their footsteps. For example, Student G said: *“I would like to do something using my hands in future such as do carpentry or repair cars. I am inspired by my older brother who is an airplane mechanic.”*

Student C wanted to take up agricultural studies as her older sister was studying in an agricultural college. Student B wanted to study business and take over his father’s automobile business while Student A wanted to be a computer engineer specialising in computerised traffic system. Overall, all students appeared to be clear in their life goals and about securing professions of their choice in future.

#### 4.3.4 Results of Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self-esteem 10-item uni-dimensional scale was used to measure the level of self-esteem of students. Low self-esteem responses were “disagree” or “strongly disagree” on items 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, and “strongly agree” or “agree” on items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9. The scale was scored by totalling the individual four point items after reverse-scoring the negatively worded items. The results of scoring are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Scorings for Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale							
	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
2. At times I think I am no good at all.	1	4	3	2	3	2	1
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	2	3	3	3	4	2	3

6. I certainly feel useless at times.	3	2	2	2	4	2	3
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.	2	1	2	2	1	1	1
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	2	2	3	2	4	2	2
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.	3	3	2	3	4	2	4
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	2	1	2	2	1	1	2
Total positive scoring	7	8	8	7	9	5	7
Total negative scoring	3	2	2	3	1	5	3
Overall rating of self-esteem	high	high	high	high	high	moderate	high

Likert scale: 1 = Strongly agree    2 = Agree    3 = Disagree    4 = Strongly disagree

Based on the ratings, it was evident that students in the study rated themselves high on the self-esteem scale. Apart from Student F, the rest had more than five positive scorings on their self-esteem. Overall, all of them were satisfied with themselves, believed that they had number of good qualities and took a positive attitude towards themselves. They strongly believed that they were able to do things as well as others and were persons with self worth. However half of them also displayed low self-esteem in terms of wanting more respect from others and at times thought they were not good at all. Overall, majority of students projected high global self-esteem. Only one student had moderate level of self-esteem with five negative scorings and five positive scorings. He rated himself as not being able to do things as well as others; did not have much to feel proud of, felt useless at times; wished for more respect from others and was inclined to think he was a failure. However, he also believed that he had a positive attitude; was satisfied with himself; had number of good qualities; and was person with self-worth. The results of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale overall presented clearly that apart from one student, the rest of students projected a high level of personal worth, self-confidence, self-satisfaction and self-respect and a low level of self-deprecation.

#### **4.4 Data for second sub research question: What beliefs and perceptions do teachers have regarding their students' self-esteem?**

Data to answer this sub question was obtained via semi-structured interviews with eight teachers as described earlier in this chapter. The answers given were validated and verified at the end of each interview session by double checking the salient points with each teacher. The data obtained were categorised according to emerging patterns into two broad themes as

followed: Teachers' perception on self-esteem of students with dyslexia and teachers' perception on teacher-student relationship. (See Appendix L for a sample transcription of semi-structured interview for teachers).

#### **4.4.1 Teachers' perception on self-esteem of students with dyslexia**

Majority of teachers perceived that students with dyslexia generally had lower self-esteem but did not rule out the possibility that some students also exhibited high self-esteem. However, more than half said low self-esteem was not necessarily linked to their dyslexic condition or learning difficulties. They thought all students with or without dyslexia had problems with low self-esteem. For example, one teacher said depression, tension and anxiety were common among all students during exams and thus it was not peculiar to only students with dyslexia. Only one teacher described dyslexia as a big handicap that influenced students' self-esteem.

All teachers characterised students with low self-esteem as having two extreme personalities. Some said students displayed passive behaviour and had low confidence in studies and personality, were shy, withdrawn, anxious, melancholic, not able to concentrate in class, quiet, day dreamed, scared of being teased and bullied, afraid to make mistakes and not active during lessons. On the other hand, some teachers described students as being aggressive and disturbed peers, disrupted lessons, did not obey instructions and refused to complete assignments, were arrogant, lazy and sometimes used dyslexia as excuse not to do work. Boys were generally thought to be more aggressive than girls.

However, some teachers said students with dyslexia also displayed high self-esteem in areas they were good at. For example, students were generally more confident in subjects they were good at or in sports. Students with high self-esteem were described as lively, friendly, impulsive, hardworking, intelligent, creative and enthusiastic although they were average in studies.

Most of the teachers cited family background as the most important factor in influencing low-self-esteem among students with dyslexia compared to school environment. Majority said family problems such as parents' divorce primarily influenced students' poor concentration, depression and anxiety in school. For example, Teacher B said: *"I think the problems faced by children with dyslexia are similar to other children. There is no special difference. For*

*example, a student called XXX has low self esteem. She has dyslexia. I don't think her low self-esteem was due to her dyslexic problem. Her bad concentration and distraction was caused by a bad divorce her parents went through. She had low self-esteem for two years due to that."*

One teacher said family support in terms of emotional and academic was important for students' self-esteem. A few teachers quoted parents' high expectations, lack of attention, and lack of understanding about dyslexia as contributing factors.

Some teachers said students' personality was also a major reason that influenced self-esteem. For example, some students were said to be poor in studies and had low self-confidence but were very active in sports and other activities they were good at. As Teacher F noted: *"If people value them, they (students) can have big expectations and high self-esteem."* However, majority felt students did not try harder, were complacent, rebellious or just gave up easily resulting in poor self-esteem due to failure in studies.

Peer support was also cited as significant. Majority of teachers said students with good peer support had high self-esteem. Teasing and bullying by peers were said to influence self-esteem but majority of teachers denied that the problem was specific to children with dyslexia. Most of them said all students had problems with bullying with some teachers stating students with dyslexia were also the bullies as well as being the victims.

Apart from two teachers, the rest thought teachers' support was not that significant compared to family and peers to influence self-esteem of students. One teacher believed that low self-esteem stemmed from childhood as a result of problems in family and could impact the learning process in school. However, some teachers did perceive that lack of educators' awareness about dyslexia and lack of support in classroom could also attribute to low self-esteem among students.

#### **4.4.2 Teachers' perception on teacher-student relationship**

Teachers unanimously agreed that they had good relationship with students with dyslexia that they taught. Majority said they showed respect to students by taking steps to understand their problems. They took the students' problems seriously and respected their opinions in classroom. Almost all teachers talked to their students about their problems with studies if they had the time. Some students also approached them for help but did not usually discuss

about their personal feelings or dyslexia. However, Teacher C cited that she talked to a student whose parents were going through divorce and that it helped the student to cope better with her anxiety and depression. She said younger students talked more of their personal problems like friendship and family than older students. Teacher F opined lack of time and burden of coping with studies hindered older students from establishing good relationship with teachers compared to younger students. However, she said: *"If they approach and if I have time, I will talk to them. Even the aggressive ones would come to talk to me. They like to talk about things they are good at or about their favourite movies and games. They don't complain often about their own problems or difficulties with dyslexia. They usually feel very good after talking - both boys and girls."*

#### **4.5 Data for third sub research question: What strategies do teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia?**

The data gathered for this question are summarised and analysed under the following emerging themes as follows:

##### **4.5.1 Development of awareness about dyslexia**

Majority of teachers felt awareness about dyslexia was important to understand the problems of students with dyslexia. Since most of them did not have formal training, teachers developed their professional knowledge about dyslexia through reading books, browsing the Internet and consulting colleagues. One special educational needs advisor said new teachers in school were given briefing about students with dyslexia in their classroom to avoid misunderstanding. He said teachers must be aware of the sensitivity and feelings of students with dyslexia and should not push them beyond their limitations or have unreasonable expectations. He opined this could adversely affect their self-esteem. Therefore, awareness and right attitude were cited as important attributes for teachers to deal with students' self-esteem.

##### **4.5.2 Encouragement of open communication**

All teachers agreed that talking to students was an effective method as it helped create good relationship and to understand their problems better. Some teachers said they gave their phone numbers and email addresses to students and encouraged free communication. Some teachers stated that it was easier to establish relationship in a smaller school as teachers knew

all the students well. Majority of teachers agreed that establishing trust between students and teachers was important.

*"Teachers play an important role in enhancing self-esteem of pupils. The way you talk to them and look at them makes them feel what you think about them. Teachers' attitude to children is important. You must respect and understand them" (Teacher D).*

Both subject and class teachers felt that they had equal responsibility to help students with dyslexia although class teachers were thought to be more accessible to students. Some subject teachers said they discussed students' problems with parents and class teachers.

#### **4.5.3 Encouragement of peer tutoring**

Some teachers used peer tutoring (working in pairs) in classroom to boost students' self-esteem. Teacher D encouraged the brighter students to help students with dyslexia during English lessons. She said the students without dyslexia liked helping the weaker students as it made them feel important. She felt students with dyslexia did not feel shy or anxious about getting help from their peers. She added: *"Children with dyslexia like it, they don't feel shy. Sometimes it is effective and good method for children. I let them choose the pairs and sometimes I choose for them."* However, not all teachers agreed to this method and said it depended on individual students' needs and personality. Some students did not like to receive help explicitly from their peers.

#### **4.5.4 Encouragement of collaborative learning**

Majority of teachers encouraged collaborative learning among children with dyslexia in an effort to promote whole class approach to learning. Not all agreed that it was necessarily welcomed or liked by students. Some felt it was effective for projects or shorter tasks. Some teachers felt it was very effective for students who were passive or withdrawn. However, some teachers said sometimes students without dyslexia saw it as a hindrance to their own pace in work and progress. Some students with dyslexia who were aggressive also tend to be disruptive and refused to co-operative with other team members.



#### **4.5.5 Provision of accommodations in classrooms**

A few teachers felt it was better to offer support in class than to talk directly to students about their problems because most students were shy to approach teachers with their problems. Some of the support they provided included accommodations such as shorter essays and dictations, oral instead of written assessment, more time to finish tests and assignments, special marking system and special reading materials.

Teacher D said: *"I let them space (give them time) so that they can give their ideas. If they want better marks, I let them prepare a short report about what they are interested in. They have more time to decide what they want to do."*

However, majority of teachers agreed that they did not provide the support explicitly as it might affect the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Some students did not like the special privileges for fear of being teased by peers or feel they were being treated differently. Teachers also said students without dyslexia sometimes questioned the special privileges given to these students and thought it was not fair. So, teachers tried to be fair in treating all students equally in classroom with whole class approach and gave privileges to all students or explained the reasons for giving such privileges to students with dyslexia. Teacher A and Teacher B cited it was not a problem in their school as it was a small setting and children had known each other since kindergarten. So they had grown up together and were aware of their peers' learning problems and were more understanding and accepting of their needs for special privileges. Both teachers also said it was also the reason why there was less bullying and teasing incidences in the school.

#### **4.5.6 Conducive learning environment and use of praise**

Some teachers felt remedial or special classes enhanced self-esteem as they could see the change in students with dyslexia being more active in special classes than regular classes. However, most also felt it was important to maintain good support in regular classrooms and rejected the idea that special schools were more suitable for students with dyslexia.

As Teacher D opined: *"A relaxed atmosphere in class is very motivating for them. For example, I don't want pupils to be stressed so I encourage group work, games and role playing... and give more time. It helps children who are more passive and withdrawn."*



Besides that, most teachers said they also praised the students often when they performed well and encouraged them to focus on their strengths. One teacher said sometimes students were surprised at their own ability to produce good work when they were encouraged or praised.

#### **4.5.7 Parent-teacher collaboration**

All teachers unanimously agreed that parent-teacher collaboration was important to boost self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Teacher F said it was important for parents and teachers to understand that they had common goals for children and to work together. Most teachers had regular meetings with parents in school at least four times a year. Some parents approached them to discuss about their children's problems. A few teachers said parents did not play an active role but used dyslexia as an excuse to demand for special privileges for their children such as special marking system or reduced workload. Teacher F, however, added that teachers needed to provide support not only to students but also to parents as she felt it was stressful having to cope with the difficulties of children with dyslexia.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter analysed and presented the results obtained from various methods in answering the research question of "What roles do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?".

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **EVALUATION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will carry out an overall evaluation of the data that was presented and analysed in Chapter 4. The discussion will align closely with the patterns and themes that emerged to answer the central research question of “What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?” that guided this study. The structure of evaluation will be carried out under three main categories: perception of students with dyslexia about their self-esteem, perception of teachers about students’ self-esteem and strategies teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

#### **5.1 Perception of students with dyslexia about their self-esteem**

One of the primary aims of this study was to develop an understanding of the perceptions students with dyslexia held regarding their self-esteem based on their own accounts. The students’ voices lent an interesting insight into the deep beliefs and thoughts they had in two domains of self-esteem namely global self-esteem and domain-specific self-esteem. Basically, global self-esteem refers to the way people feel about themselves whereas domain-specific self-esteem refers to the way people appraise their particular abilities, talents and attributes (Brown & Marshall, 2001).

##### **5.1.1 Global self-esteem**

Notably, the present research was mostly slanted towards examining perceptions of students’ global self-esteem in the school setting. It was consistent with most researchers’ contention that academic performance was positively related to global self-esteem (Shavelson, 1985, in Yu, 2002). Although not always accurate, school performance was seen as an indicator of a student’s worth and capability.

Based on data analysis in Chapter 4, it was evident from the students’ self-accounts and self-esteem ratings that they displayed an overall high global self-esteem. This reflected students’ positive ethos towards their school and academic life. Although 50 percent of students felt inadequate in terms of garnering self-respect from others and at times thought they were not good especially in terms of academic achievement, still it did not affect their overall sense of

personal worth, self-confidence and self-satisfaction in school. Only one student fell in the moderate level of self-esteem and appeared to think that he was not able to do things as well as others; did not have much to feel proud of; felt useless at times; wished for more respect from others and was inclined to think he was a failure. However, he still believed that he had a positive attitude; was satisfied with himself; had number of good qualities; and was person with self-worth. The findings contrasted starkly with most researches that showed children with dyslexia often experienced and developed maladaptive self-referential styles (consistently refer to themselves in a negative way) and displayed low levels of self-esteem (Humphrey, 2003). The findings also deferred from most authors' conclusions that children with dyslexia integrated into mainstream schooling generally had lowered levels of self-esteem (Crozier, Ress-Morris-Beattie & Bellin, 1999). Particularly, it also contrasted Riddick's (1996) study of 22 children with dyslexia along with their parents and teachers which found that children with dyslexia felt disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, depressed and embarrassed by their learning difficulties. Half of them reported having been teased about their difficulties and many had bad experiences in mainstream education involving teachers who were ignorant of or did not acknowledge the existence of dyslexia.

In contrast, the findings in the present study showed that most students had self-respect, appreciated one's own merits and yet recognised personal faults that corresponded with Rosenberg's (1986) definition of high self-esteem. In addition, Rosenberg stated that the person with high self-esteem did not consider himself or herself better than others, but neither did he consider himself inferior to others, which again corroborated with the findings of this study.

All the students, nevertheless, admitted having to try harder than their peers in understanding certain subjects such as Czech language and Chemistry indicating that they did not deny the fact that academics still posed a struggle for them. However, most of them appeared happy that they received help in countering the problems via extra support in school and home or putting in extra effort themselves to learn the subjects. This again corresponded with Rosenberg's observation (1986) that a person with high self-esteem was likely to "seek personal growth, development and improvement by pushing themselves to the limits to exercise their capabilities" (Owens et al, 2001).

Majority of students indicated that they liked school very much especially the friendly teachers, good friends and break times. Although some students complained about the long hours, lousy meals in canteen and difficult subjects, they did not mention any serious incidences of bullying or teasing. This again was not consistent with studies that commonly linked students' self-esteem to bullying and teasing (Riddick, 1996; Baumeister, 2003). On the whole, students appeared to have high academic self-esteem and were unanimously satisfied with their school experience and did not want to change anything about it. The responses derived from Three Magic Wishes Task (*see Chapter 4 for results*) reflected a desire for improvement in school such as better teachers, shorter school hours, more practical work, better facilities and a fun teaching approach. This indicated that given a conducive learning environment in school, students would appreciate their learning process better. Evidently, this positive outlook negated studies showing children with dyslexia as displaying constant anxiety (Soan, 2004), low self-confidence, behaviour problems and signs of depressive thoughts and actions which may stem from frustration and high levels of stress (Ranaldi, 2003) due to their learning environment in schools.

Interestingly, high global self-esteem was also demonstrated in the students' clear goals and perceptions regarding their future prospects. All of them were optimistic about wanting to continue their studies to upper secondary level or high school. Some of them cited highly technical jobs such as computer engineering or running the family's business while others wanted to take up business or agricultural studies. Two boys wanted to take up carpentry as they were interested in mechanical jobs and one wanted so passionately to be a cook as it was his childhood dream. Baumeister (2003), however, cautioned about the so-called "dark side" of high self-esteem as he believed that, "high self-esteem can mean confident and secure but it can also mean conceited, arrogant, narcissistic and egotistical" (2003). Also, research has shown that individuals with high self-esteem were more likely to set inappropriate, risky goals for themselves beyond their performance capabilities (2003). The implication of this "dark side" of high self-esteem did not apply to students of this study as they appeared very clear, realistic and optimistic about their life goals.

In terms of relationships, all the students demonstrated as having good relationship with peers, teachers and family members. This corroborated well with Rosenberg's (1986) statement that in addition to academic self-concept, positive family relationships, the number

of best friends and physical appearance were key variables that directly affected global self-esteem (present study did not explore the physical appearance aspect).

A number of researchers have found that the relationships with parents and global self-esteem were highly correlated (Ho, 1992; Huang, 1997; Ju, 1996; Mcclun & Merrell, 1998; Wu, 1998 in Yu, 2002). Adolescents who perceived their parents as having an authoritative parenting style had a more positive self-concept than those who perceived their parents as having an authoritarian orientation (Mcclun & Merrell in Yu, 2002).

In the context of this study, the fact that all students turned to their family members for help in terms of academic and personal problems showed that they had a close relationship which could influence their self-esteem. This aligned with Emler's (2001, in Humphrey, 2004) suggestion that the most influential significant others in children's life were the parents and "indeed that parents' behaviour such as the amount of acceptance, approval and affection is perhaps the strong source of individual differences in self-esteem". However, this study did not look deeply into the family factor in enhancing self-esteem due to time constraint which perhaps could warrant future investigation.

Students in the study also exhibited a close and trusting relationship with their teachers with majority expressing free and open communication and access to discuss their academic problems during and after school hours. They also took comfort in the fact that teachers respected them by talking to them about their problems and understood their problems with studies by giving them extra support. Predictably, students from the school in Prague 5 with lesser number of students (235) were able to foster closer ties with teachers by exchanging emails and phone numbers compared to students in the school in Prague 6 with higher student population (650 students). Humphrey (2003) has argued that teachers and peers are extremely influential especially in the context of academic self-esteem. Humphrey said teachers influenced self esteem because they were experts and authority figures and one of the two primary source of feedback about scholastic competence (the other being peer group).

Peers were seen as an important part of students' life in this study with all of them having many good friends in and outside school. A recurrent comment when asked about the best part about school was the break times where students could spend time with their friends. Some of the students also enjoyed studying in groups or having their friends as peer tutors. This corresponded with studies which found that relationships with peers were highly

correlated to global self-esteem (Berndt & Keefe, 1998; Cheng & Chang, 1994; Chu, 1981; McClun & Merrell, 1998 in Yu, 2002). Berndt and Keefe (1998) revealed that students who described their friendships as having more positive features perceived their global self-worth more positively during adolescence. On the other hand, most of the subjects did not experience that their difficulties influenced their relations and friendships; it rather seemed as if good peer relations compensated for their difficulties. Westling-Allodi (2000, in Ingesson, 2007) suggested that one way to deal with difficulties at school was to "turn on" peer relations - that was actively choose to invest in relationships rather than scholastic achievements.

### **5.1.2 Domain-specific self-esteem**

In terms of domain-specific self-esteem, subjects in this study exhibited vast interest in hobbies, interests and outdoor activities. All the seven students had a hobby or interest that they pursued actively with friends or individually after school hours. The two female students took up dancing professionally and one male student played football for the school and village teams. The rest participated in more than one activity that included trekking, cycling, listening to music, playing hockey and swimming. This corresponded with the domain-specific concept that a person may feel that she or he had poor academic skills, but a great deal of common sense (Conley, 2007) in other domains of their self. Indeed, such domain-specific self-esteem may be comforting because it allowed people to maintain a positive view of themselves in the face of subpar performance in some domains (2007). Coopersmith (1967) also suggested that teenagers with high self-esteem were usually more successful in both academic and social environments compared to teenagers with low self-esteem. Overall, it could be surmised that students in the present study strongly had a high level of global and domain specific self-esteem that exhibited the following striking characteristics:

1. They were overall satisfied with themselves;
2. They believed that they had number of good qualities;
3. They had a positive attitude towards themselves;
4. They strongly believed that they were able to do things as well as others; and
5. They believed they were persons with self worth



The plausible reason for this besides strong peer, teacher and parent support could be that many of the students in this study could adapt and cope better with their dyslexic problems as they grew older. Studies showed that with the identification and gradual acknowledgement of dyslexic difficulties, students might gradually realise that their reading and writing difficulties were something specific, and not part of their identity (Ingesson, 2007). Since their emotional adjustment improved with age, it might indicate that the identification of their difficulties turned out to be more positive in the long run (2007). This was strongly evident in the Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task (*see Chapter 4 for analysis*) where students presented metaphors that fell into the surmountable and insurmountable barriers category. Although some metaphors exhibited a sense of helplessness (for example, dyslexia was described as a difficult test or parasite), most of them were positive, creative and optimistic (for example dyslexia was seen as a bright, colourful painting or as a man wearing a lawn). Most students had a high sense of positive outlook about their learning problems and accepted dyslexia as something they could cope with and accept as part of their life. They exhibited strong feelings of self-efficacy and “internal locus of control” (Burden and Burdett, 2007). They had a clear perception about their dyslexia and did not see it as a hindrance to their learning process or other goals in life.

Some students held an optimistic view of dyslexia as follows: *“If I can’t change it, I might as well look at it in a positive way” (Student E).*

*“It may not necessarily be a bad thing. It can be looked at positively and can be changed. I can change it” (Student G).*

Perhaps with better acceptance and understanding of their difficulties as they grew older, students were able to realise that they were normal in every other aspect but had a specific difficulty with reading and writing. This perhaps largely facilitated a high sense of worthiness and contributed to high self-esteem of students in this study.

Overall, the generalisation of high self-esteem of students with dyslexia was subject to the context, school culture, demographics and educational setting of the specific group of sample in this study and may thus produce different results if replicated in another setting or context.



## 5.2 Teachers' perception on self-esteem of students with dyslexia

Teachers in this study generally perceived self-esteem of students with dyslexia as follows:

1. Students with dyslexia generally had lower self-esteem;
2. Students with dyslexia sometimes exhibited high self-esteem in subjects or tasks they were good at;
3. Self-esteem of students with dyslexia did not defer from their peers; and
4. Family and peer support was more important to influence self-esteem compared to teacher support

Consistent with most studies, teachers pinpointed two characteristics of students exhibiting low self-esteem. One group of students was said to display passive behaviour and had low confidence in studies and personality, were shy, withdrawn, anxious, melancholic, not able to concentrate in class, quiet, day dreamed, scared of being teased and bullied, afraid to make mistakes and not active during lessons. Girls were said to dominate than boys in this category. Literature showed that such negative feelings and behavioural manifestations could be attributed to students adopting a characteristic strategy for dealing with life that was protective and defensive (Rosenberg, 1986). They did this by hiding their academic problems or emotions from peers and teachers. Singer (2005) demonstrated in his study on bullying that students with dyslexia displayed passive feelings to avoid being teased or feel worthless. Ott (1997) pinpointed the additional loss of self-esteem, self-doubt and sensitivity to criticism experienced by teenagers with dyslexia, arising from a feeling of failure, added to their feeling of isolation and becoming alienated from peers.

The second group of students with low self-esteem were characterised as being aggressive and disturbed peers, disrupted lessons, did not obey instructions and refused to complete assignments, were arrogant, lazy and sometimes used dyslexia as excuse not to do work. Boys were generally thought to be more aggressive than girls in this category. Primarily, teachers attributed this deviant behaviour to students' own personality. Majority thought students did not try harder, were complacent, rebellious or just gave up easily in studies resulting in poor self-esteem.

Researchers appeared to refute this claim and stated that the deviant behaviour was in reality an avoidance coping strategy resulting from anxiety or depression (Humphrey, 2004). Humphrey (2004) said it was not surprising that teachers often misconstrued this behaviour as laziness or arrogance due to ignorance and lack of understanding. Peer and Reid (2003) also supported the view that "frustration led very often to anti-social or deviant behaviour" among individuals with dyslexia, especially those with low self-esteem. Alexandar-Passe (2006), in reference to Wally Morgan's 1997 study of delinquent/criminal people with dyslexia, stated that when children with dyslexia failed to keep up at school, their self-esteem dropped as they begin to question their academic abilities (develop inferiority complexes). Some pupils might disrupt a class because they interpreted the class work as threatening and used attention seeking means to protect self-esteem. It was suggested that if the teachers re-interpreted and communicated the nature and purpose of class work clearly, the pupils' behaviour would change.

Some teachers believed students with dyslexia also displayed high self-esteem in areas they were good at. For example, students were generally more confident in subjects they were good at or in sports. Students with high self-esteem were described as lively, friendly, impulsive, hardworking, intelligent, creative and enthusiastic although they were average in studies. Teachers also identified most students who participated in this study as falling under this category.

Controversial findings that claimed sometimes teachers themselves could be a source of low self-esteem among children did not arise in the context of this study. For example, Humphrey and Mullins' study (2004) showed that the influence of teachers as "significant others" was an important factor in the low self-esteem exhibited by children. Other studies have also revealed teachers' negative behaviour and attitude towards children with dyslexia as well as the effect of their own low self-esteem impacted teaching and children's literacy attainment (Gurney, 1988 in Humphrey, 2004). All teachers in the current study appeared to have a good relationship with students with dyslexia that they taught. Majority said they showed respect to students by taking steps to understand their problems. They claimed to take students' problems seriously and respected their opinions in classroom. They also discouraged bullying and teasing among peers by encouraging students to work together. Almost all teachers talked to their students about their problems with studies if they had time. Some students also

approached them for help but not necessarily to discuss about their personal feelings or dyslexia.

However, more than two thirds of teachers also opined that self-esteem was not necessarily related to dyslexia or learning difficulties. Only one teacher who was also the special educational needs advisor described dyslexia as a big handicap that directly influenced students' self-esteem. She said students spent only a small portion of time in school but unfortunately that was the part they had to struggle most with. The rest of teachers thought all students with or without dyslexia generally had problems with low self-esteem. Teasing and bullying by peers were said to influence self-esteem but majority of teachers denied that the problem was specific to children with dyslexia. Most of them said all students had problems with bullying at some point in their schooling life. Some teachers justified by claiming that students with dyslexia were the victims but sometimes they were also the bullies. Riddick (1996) in his study of 22 students with dyslexia pointed out that half of students reported having been teased about their difficulties and many had bad experiences in mainstream education involving teachers who were either ignorant of or did not acknowledge the existence of dyslexia.

Some teachers in the study appeared to prefer the whole school approach in dealing with self-esteem resulting from bullying, teasing, depression and other behavioural problems. While this was commendable and consistent with most inclusive education philosophy in mainstream schools that promoted whole-school approach (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), it may not augur well if passive and withdrawn students with dyslexia were to risk suffering in silence due to neglect or lack of emotional support.

In terms of support, apart from two teachers, the rest thought teachers' support was not that significant compared to family and peers to influence self-esteem of students. Majority of teachers said family problems such as divorce between parents, high expectations, lack of attention and lack of understanding as contributing factors to students' self-esteem. Peer rejection or acceptance was also perceived to significantly determine self-esteem. Students with lots of friends were believed to project high self-esteem.

While this view corroborated with some studies, perhaps teachers were not aware that they were increasingly serving as students' "significant others" and as such contributed to the make-up of pupils' self-esteem (Humphrey, 2003). Teachers, therefore, should adopt a

consistent approach to teaching pupils with dyslexia in which they are “accepting”, “genuine” and “empathetic” (2003) towards students’ problems with self-esteem. A common solution offered by studies was to improve teachers’ awareness and understanding of their own role in supporting children with dyslexia.

### **5.3 Strategies teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia**

Although the two schools in this study did not have any special self-enhancement programs for students with dyslexia, teachers essentially appeared to have adopted various strategies to enhance self-esteem such as developing an accepting attitude towards students with dyslexia, encouraging open communication, facilitating peer tutoring, encouraging co-operative learning, providing accommodations in classroom, use of praise and encouraging parent-teacher collaboration. All of these strategies corresponded with what most research recommended to facilitate better learning process of students with dyslexia. However, it can be argued that better learning process resulted in increased self-confidence which in turn determined self-esteem. As Elbaum and Vaudhn (2001) suggested, effective classroom-based interventions could provide positive effects on the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Although the strategies mentioned in this study could not be evaluated for its effectiveness or direct impact on self-esteem, it is worthy of comment in light of its usefulness to students with dyslexia.

#### **5.3.1 Development of awareness about dyslexia**

Majority of teachers understood the importance of gaining awareness and knowledge about dyslexia. Although lacking in formal training in dyslexia, most of them proactively developed their professional knowledge through reading books, browsing the Internet, consulting colleagues and attending conferences. In one school, it was commendable that new teachers were given briefing about students with dyslexia in their classroom. It was aimed at promoting better awareness of the sensitivity and feelings of students with dyslexia and preventing teachers from pushing students beyond their limitations by setting unreasonable goals. Students in the study also corroborated on this issue and remarked during interviews that they felt teachers respected them better since they were aware of dyslexia and could understand their problems with learning. This was important as evidence showed that most children’s self-esteem was crushed when some teachers refused to acknowledge the existence of dyslexia and thought children were just being “thick” or “lazy” and parents were being

pushy (Riddick, 1996) when they requested for special privileges for their children. As such, Riddick (1996) agreed that improving teachers' awareness and understanding was an obvious and immediate solution to the problem of "dyslexia folklore".

### **5.3.2 Encouragement of open communication**

All teachers agreed that interacting with students was an effective method as it helped create good relationship and to understand their problems better. Students in the study also all agreed that they approached teachers about study difficulties although rarely about personal problems. They turned to parents or friends for emotional support. In one school, teachers gave their phone numbers and email addresses to students and encouraged free communication. Some teachers stated that it was easier to establish relationship in a smaller school as teachers knew all the students better. Majority of teachers agreed that establishing trust between students and teachers was important as it helped instil a sense of confidence and self-respect among students and facilitated positive self-esteem. This view corresponded with most studies which suggested teachers should be encouraged to develop their existing counseling skills so that they became more accepting, genuine and empathetic towards their students.

However, it was noted that none of the school had a formal student counseling service that facilitated students' social and emotional problems. Teachers tended to have informal chats when they had the time or when students approached them for help. McKissock (2001, in Humphrey, 2003) suggested that perhaps counseling skills could be adopted into teaching roles at a general level if intensive training was not possible due to lack of resources or time. He argued that since counseling qualities were inherent in all people, teachers could effectively play the role of professional counsellors and "retain their right to give instructions, information, advice, feedback, alongside counsellors' roles of non-judgemental support, clarification and guidance" (McKissock, 2001). Since there was a gap in research on counseling for students with dyslexia and its effect on self-esteem, this warranted for more investigation.

### **5.3.3 Encouragement of peer tutoring**

Gurney (1988, in Humphrey, 2004) stated that peer tutoring has long been associated with efficient remediation of academic problems in children. This method although was important

was not very popular among teachers in the context of this study as compared to group learning. Only one subject teacher found it to be effective for her English language classes. However, considering its significance and substantial supportive research evidence, I thought it was worth mentioning as an effective strategy that could be replicated in other educational context. The strategy the teacher in this study used was to allow students with dyslexia to choose their own partner to help with lessons. Contrary to some claims (Slayer, 1987, Riddick, 1996) that pupils with dyslexia did not like to receive help explicitly from their peers, the teacher felt students with dyslexia did not feel embarrassed about getting help from their own friends or that it affected their self-esteem. She said the students without dyslexia also liked the peer tutor responsibility as it enhanced their own self-esteem and made them feel important and valuable. This was supported by Gurney's (1988) view that "in a neutral, non-confrontational mode, mutual respect is generated, personal relationship is strengthened and the self-esteem of both parties is enhanced".

It had also been suggested by several authors (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Humphrey, 2003) that such peer support systems encouraged feelings of acceptance and being valued and promoted a sense of community within school. Thus, students were actively encouraged to seek help from each other and to offer help when it was needed, to share rather than compete for friends, and to act as advocates for those who they feel have been treated unfairly. Other benefits included better social interaction for passive and withdrawn students and elimination of stigmatising and negative stereotypes others have of students with dyslexia (Humphrey, 2002) that served to erode self-esteem.

#### **5.3.4 Encouragement of co-operative learning**

Collaborative learning appeared to be the most popular method used by teachers to promote effective learning that enhanced self-esteem of students with dyslexia in this study. This was in line with some 600 studies that have shown positive results of using co-operative learning as a tool to help children with learning difficulties learn effectively in mainstream schools (Srivastava, 2006). Some teachers in this study felt it was effective for projects, more difficult subjects or shorter tasks. Students' accounts also corroborated with this claim. Through their interactions with others, students received feedback and support that helped them clarify issues and build understandings. These reciprocal interactions probably served to maintain their involvement and interest in the group tasks, while simultaneously helping them to solve



problems and construct new understandings (Webb et al., 1995; Wittrock, 1990 in Slavin, 1996).

A challenge for teachers in the present study, though, was that sometimes students without dyslexia saw it as a hindrance to their own pace in work and progress if they were grouped with students who were passive and withdrawn. Some students with dyslexia who were aggressive also tend to be disruptive and refused to co-operative with other team members. Perhaps a more structured method of co-operative learning could be more effective instead of simply having students work in a group. One study showed that the children with learning difficulties in the structured groups were more involved in their groups' activities and provided more directions and help to other group members than their peers in the unstructured groups (Slavin, 1996).

Structured co-operative learning environment would be most effective in producing academic gains as there was individual accountability. It meant that the success of the group depended upon the success of the each individual group member, group goals and individual accountability. This model was most effective in improving each group member's performance and promoting co-operation and better peer relations (1996).

#### **5.3.5 Provision of accommodations in classroom**

The Mississippi Handbook of Dyslexia (1999) suggested accommodation as "any technique that alters the academic setting or environment and enables students to indicate more accurately what they actually know". It merely provided the extra time, the special setting, and/or the added assistance that enabled accurate assessment of the student's real knowledge rather than an assessment of the student's weaknesses. It stressed that an accommodation generally did not change the information or amount of information learned. In the context of this study, the support teachers provided included response accommodations such as giving shorter essays and dictations, opting for oral instead of written assessment, adopting special marking system and using special reading materials as well as timing accommodations such as allowing more time to finish tests and assignments. Cortiella (2005) contended that accommodation was an effective strategy that provided equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities, asserting it served to "level the playing field" for children with dyslexia.



However, majority of teachers agreed that they did not provide the support explicitly as it might affect the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. This is line with Sayer's (1987) argument that any practice which singled children out actually lowered their self-esteem. Such support may sometimes be misconstrued by the student as yet another evidence of his or her failure or "stupidity" (Riddick, 1996). Teachers also said students without dyslexia sometimes questioned the special privileges given and thought it was not fair. So, teachers tried to be fair in treating all students equally in classroom with whole class approach and gave privileges to all students or explained the reasons for giving such privileges to students with dyslexia.

Although the direct impact of accommodations on students' self-esteem could not determined in this study, other studies confirmed that appropriate accommodations helped students with dyslexia to "move from dependence to independence" and that some accommodations were more "empowering and enabling" in helping their learning process (Weinfeld et al, 2005).

#### **5.3.6 Use of praise**

Most teachers said they also praised the students often when they performed well and encouraged them to focus on their strengths such as sports or subjects they were good at. Interestingly, some teachers mentioned that since praising was not a common practice in the Czech school culture, some students found it awkward and embarrassing. However, she felt it did promote positive self-esteem in students. One teacher said sometimes students were surprised at their own ability to produce good work when they were encouraged or praised. It has been suggested by research that praise for effort may be more beneficial (Mueller and Dweck, 1998; Owens, 2001), but this may be difficult to instill in an education system where the emphasis was increasingly placed upon achievement.

Dweck (1998), however, cautioned against "blind" approach to praise. For instance, Mueller and Dweck (1998) tested the commonly held belief that praise for ability had beneficial effects on motivation. Contrary to expectations, they found that praising children for intelligence made them highly performance oriented and thus extremely vulnerable to the effects of subsequent setbacks; consistently telling children that they are intelligent when they pass tasks may, therefore, have negative long-term consequences for self-esteem. On the other hand, encouraging children for their efforts and helping them to recognise their strengths and weaknesses will nurture an "inner" self-esteem that was based on children's

actual actions, skills and behaviours rather than a false “feel-good” self-esteem that had little basis in reality (Owens, 2001).

### **5.3.7 Parent-teacher collaboration**

Parent-teacher collaboration was seen to be important to boost self-esteem of students with dyslexia. A special educational needs advisor said it was important for parents and teachers to understand that they had common goals for children and to work together. The schools in this study facilitated collaboration via meetings with parents at least four times a year. One teacher interestingly commented said teachers needed to provide support not only to students but also to parents as she felt it was stressful having to cope with the difficulties of children with dyslexia. Since this study did not take into account the opinions of parents, it was not possible to draw conclusive comments on the strategy other than to state that teachers considered that parents played an important role in their students’ self-esteem by providing sufficient emotional support in the family environment.

Overall, the strategies employed in this study collaborated with other studies and were proven to be effective in enhancing self-esteem although not in a direct or explicit way. Since each student with dyslexia was different and unique, some strategies may or may not be effective, applicable or successful. It was also dependent on the context of the school culture, background of community and educational setting of the school. Humphrey’s (2004) emphasis on the changing role of teachers, peers and the school environment to provide a more accepting and dyslexia-friendly educational climate for children as well as early identification and better provision of teaching strategies to offset the low self-esteem level among students with dyslexia was clearly reflected in this study. Perhaps this explained why students in this study projected a high level of self-esteem and a positive sense of well-being. It appeared, therefore, that self-esteem was likely to be best facilitated not by expansive or expensive intervention methods that focused on making students with dyslexia feel good about themselves but by using simple classroom techniques that instilled inner feelings of worthiness, self-respect and self-confidence which was sustainable and lasting. In this respect, the teachers’ role was important as a motivator, enabler and encourager in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

#### **5.4 Summary**

This chapter had evaluated the findings of the study and weighed the cons and pros of the strategies of facilitating self-esteem among students with dyslexia against common literature besides examining students' and teachers' perceptions of self-esteem.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### **6.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will evaluate the methods and research findings of this study. The implications of the findings for children with dyslexia and to my professional practice in the field of dyslexia will be discussed. Lastly, I will pinpoint the limitations of the research as well as outline recommendations for future research that will add to the body of knowledge about dyslexia and self-esteem.

#### **6.1 Evaluation of methods**

Set against a Czech educational context, this small-scale research employed a flexible research design to get an insight into the role teachers play in enhancing the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Sample of seven students and eight teachers was selected from two basic schools in Prague 5 and 6. The central research question that guided this study was “What role do teachers play in enhancing self-esteem among students with dyslexia in the lower secondary level?”. Three sub questions that were also addressed included:

1. What beliefs and perceptions do students have regarding their self-esteem?;
2. What beliefs and perceptions do teachers have regarding their students’ self-esteem?;  
and
3. What strategies do teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia?

The use of qualitative multiple case study that was exploratory and interpretive in nature was appropriate as it enabled multiple meanings and viewpoints to be gained through semi-structured interviews from both teachers and students. In addition, a rich source of data was generated via use of creative qualitative data collection methods such as Three Magic Wishes Task and Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task. Document analysis of psychological reports provided a good background and better understanding of students’ literacy difficulties and helped strengthen the inference process. However, due to lack of time and barriers of accessibility and language, observations of students with dyslexia could not be carried out in

classrooms. The only positivistic method that supplemented this study was the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale to measure the level of self-esteem of students in the form of a Likert scale. Overall, the use of multi-method approach enabled the primary objectives of this study to be achieved successfully as follows:

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the beliefs and perceptions students with dyslexia have regarding their self-esteem;
2. To develop a deeper understanding about the awareness, beliefs and perceptions teachers have regarding self-esteem of students with dyslexia; and
3. To gain insight into the strategies teachers used in enhancing the self-esteem of students.

## **6.2 Evaluation of findings**

The study on the whole yielded a refreshing outlook in terms of how students perceived their own self-esteem and how teachers perceived and enhanced the self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

### **6.2.1 Students' perception of self-esteem**

Students in the context of this study appeared to project an overall high global and domain-specific self-esteem. It was especially appealing to find that in contrast to usual negative portrayal of students with dyslexia, the sample in this study displayed a very positive ethos not only towards their school and academic life but also towards their personal life and future goals. Their high sense of personal worth, self-confidence and self-satisfaction did not conform to most studies that generally branded children with dyslexia as having low self-esteem. Besides forging strong relationship with their peers, teachers and parents, students also were more acceptable and realistic towards their literacy problems. All these factors combined could have contributed to their high self-esteem and positive attitude.

### **6.2.2 Teachers' perception of students' self-esteem**

Teachers in this study, however, perceived that students with dyslexia generally had lower self-esteem. They opined that those in the lower self-esteem category displayed two extreme types of characteristics and behaviours: passive, shy and withdrawn on one hand and aggressive, lazy and arrogant on the other hand. Nevertheless, teachers also believed students

with dyslexia sometimes exhibited high self-esteem in subjects or tasks they were good at. Interestingly, most teachers did not single out low self-esteem as being peculiar to only students with dyslexia. They perceived all students with or without dyslexia had problems with self-esteem. However, all teachers believed that lack of family and peer support as important factor that influenced self-esteem compared to teacher support and school environment.

### **6.2.3 Strategies teachers use to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia**

Teachers essentially appeared to have good awareness about the need to adopt various strategies to enhance self-esteem of students with dyslexia. Although the schools in this study did not have special self-enhancement programs for students with dyslexia, teachers essentially appeared to have adopted various strategies to enhance self-esteem such as developing an accepting attitude towards students with dyslexia, encouraging open communication, facilitating peer tutoring, encouraging co-operative learning, providing accommodations in classroom, use of praise and encouraging parent-teacher collaboration. All of these strategies corresponded with what most research recommended to facilitate better learning process of students with dyslexia and were useful in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

Overall, the findings sought to answer the central research of this study and concluded that the teachers' role as a motivator, enabler and encourager was important in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

### **6.3 Implications for practice**

My primary aim to carry out this research stemmed from the realisation that there was a paucity of studies into self-esteem of students with dyslexia especially in Malaysia. Furthermore, the existent studies mostly did not take into account the students' voices about their own self-esteem which I believed was the strongest link in any study about dyslexia. In this respect, the current study had to a certain extent added valuable knowledge to the current body of research on self-esteem. The high self-esteem displayed by students in the case study also added a new dimension to common belief that students generally had low self-esteem. I refuse to believe that respondent bias could have played a role here. It was strongly demonstrated that students with dyslexia were capable of having self-worth, self-confidence

and self-respect despite their literacy difficulties given enough support from parents, teachers and peers. It also dismantled the general perception that students with dyslexia generally had low expectations in life. It would, however, be interesting to learn if the findings could be replicated in different educational settings such as primary or high school. Therefore, this study facilitated some groundwork to initiate similar self-esteem studies in other educational settings in both Czech Republic and Malaysia that would benefit teachers, parents and also children.

Methodologically, the use of semi-projective tasks such as metaphors and Three Magic Wishes Task also had major implications as they proved to be effective qualitative tools to solicit data about deeper inner feelings of students with dyslexia. This could be adopted in other research contexts in contrast to more positivistic methods like questionnaire or survey which could not gauge the deeper inner feelings of students.

Moreover, the use of various strategies to enhance self-esteem by Czech teachers was valuable knowledge and could be effectively emulated by teachers in the Malaysian context. Since teachers in Malaysia lacked the awareness about such strategies, perhaps it would serve to educate them as well as add to their professional knowledge. Moreover, strategies such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning, parent-teacher collaboration, use of praise and informal counseling were effective to enhance self-esteem and promote better learning process not only for students with dyslexia but also for the whole class. In the Czech context, more support should be given to teachers to perhaps implement peer tutoring and collaborative learning in a more structured and effective manner where all students could participate efficiently and willingly.

Overall, the positive results gained in this study had triggered my curiosity and interest to initiate a similar study, which was long overdue, at the dyslexia organisation I served back home in Malaysia. It would be beneficial to see if the findings could be replicated among students with dyslexia in the Malaysian context.

#### **6.4 Limitations of study**

Since this is a small-scale research within a limited time period, it was not possible to select a large sample for purpose of generalisation, standardisation or replication. Therefore, the comprehensive study of teachers' role in enhancing self-esteem of students with dyslexia across several schools was not feasible. Only two schools were able to co-operate in this



study albeit some restrictions about students' confidentiality and time schedule. For example, one school had denied access to students' psychological reports.

Furthermore, due to teachers' extremely busy schedule and since it was nearing the end of school term, it was quite difficult to get class teachers to participate in this study. As such, it was finally decided to also include subject teachers who also played a part in enhancing students' self-esteem.

Another limitation was the language where interviews with teachers and students were conducted via translators. A caveat would be that some interesting and original anecdotes of the interviewees could be lost in the process. This was especially a shortcoming during the Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task for students where it could have more valid and meaningful if I could understand the students' narration of their difficulties. Translations, although carried out by experienced teachers, may pose a limitation as meanings could be misinterpreted. Language barrier was also another reason why observation method was not used in this study.

#### **6.5 Recommendations for future studies**

In carrying out this study, I realised that it could be a springboard to initiate other potential studies in both the Czech and Malaysian educational settings.

1. A longitudinal study examining extensively the self-esteem of students with dyslexia extending from primary to secondary school life could be carried out. This would give a better understanding of the changing patterns of self-esteem and also evaluate the factors contributing to self-esteem during the period. A larger sample including students without dyslexia could yield a clearer picture and perhaps prove whether some teachers' belief that there was no difference in self-esteem among students with and without dyslexia was indeed valid.
2. The Three Magic Wishes Task and Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task could be extended into full-fledged studies in their own respect to examine self-esteem of students with dyslexia.

3. Teachers' allegation that peer and family support influenced self-esteem more than teachers' and school support also warranted for further investigation. It would be interesting to learn about parents' viewpoints of their children's self-esteem.
4. Experimental studies on strategies employed to enhance self-esteem such as peer tutoring and collaborative learning would be useful and timely especially in Malaysia where such studies were non-existent.

## **6.6 Summary**

In this chapter, the research findings and the research methods used in this study were evaluated. The implications of the research on education, the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future directions were also outlined.

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## APPENDIX A

### Sample consent letter for parents (Czech version)

Poongkody Palany

Erasmus Mundus SEN Programme, Department of Special Pedagogy

Charles University, Prague

Mgr .....  
.....

Věc: dopis rodičům prostřednictvím ředitele školy

Vážení rodiče,

Dovolte, abych se představila. Jmenuji se Poongkody Palany a jsem studentkou v magisterském programu ERASMUS MUNDUS organizovaném Katedrou speciální pedagogiky, Pedagogické Fakulty, Univerzity Karlovy v Praze.

Provádím šetření týkající se role učitele při posilování sebevědomí žáků s dyslexií na základních školách v České Republice.

Ráda bych vás požádala o souhlas s účastí vašeho dítěte na tomto šetření. Konkrétně se jedná o rozhovor se žákem a možnost nahlédnout do jeho školní osobní dokumentace.

Ujišťuji Vás, že všechny údaje budou přísně důvěrné a použité výhradně pro potřeby šetření.

V případě pochybností nebo dotazů velmi ráda vše objasním.

Spojení:

- V anglickém jazyce – Poongkody Palany, Tel: 773458840, email: poongkody@gmail.com
- V českém jazyce – Dr Iva Strnadová, Tel: 221900270, email: iva@strnadovapedf.cuni.cz

Děkuji za pochopení a souhlas.

S pozdravem,  
.....

Poongkody Palany

Jméno dítěte:

Datum narození:

Dne:

Potvrzujeme, že jsme byli seznámeni s projektem a souhlasíme, aby se naše dcera/ náš syn tohoto šetření účastnil/a.

Podpisy rodičů:

.....

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Semi-structured interview questions for students (English version)**

Name of student: (optional)

Age:

Gender:

Location of home:

Grade:

Year of diagnosis:

#### **List of questions:**

1. How are you feeling today?
2. Can you tell me something about yourself? (family, interests, hobby etc)
3. What are your personal strengths?
4. What do you enjoy most about school? Why?
5. What do you enjoy the least about school? Why?
6. Do you think that you have to try harder than your friends to understand certain subjects?
7. What kind of extra help do you need with studies?
8. Do you talk to your teachers about your problems? (personal, academic etc)
9. Do teachers notice your problems?
10. Is there any teacher you approach more often for advice? What is he/she like?
11. Do you have any group activities in classroom or school? (discussion, project, etc)
12. Do you like to take part in group activities?
13. How many friends do you have?
14. Do you have any problems in school?
15. Who do you talk to when you have problems? (friends, teacher, parents)
16. If you would the chance to change anything about your school, what would it be?
17. What would you like to do in future? (ambition, higher education, job etc)



## APPENDIX C

### Semi-structured interview questions for students (Czech version)

#### Otázky k rozhovoru

Žákům položíme doplňující otázky, týkající se jejich školních zkušeností a zážitků.

1. Jak se dnes cítíš?
2. Můžeš mi o sobě něco říct? (o rodině, o tvých koníčcích, zájmech atd.)
3. Jaké jsou tvé silné stránky?
4. Z čeho se nejvíc těšíš ve škole, co se Ti tam líbí? Proč?
5. Co se Ti ve škole líbí nejméně, co se ti tam nelíbí? Proč?
6. Máš pocit, že se musíš snažit víc než Tví spolužáci a kamarádi, abys porozuměl některým předmětům?
7. Jakou speciální pomoc (pomoc navíc) potřebuješ ke svému studiu?
8. Mluvíš se svými učiteli o problémech? (osobních, školních atd.)
9. Všimají si učitelé tvých problémů?
10. Vyhledáváš některého z učitelů pro konzultaci svých problémů víc než ostatní? Jaký/á je?
11. Podnikáte ve třídě / ve škole nějaké skupinové aktivity? (diskuse, debaty, projekty atd.)
12. Zúčastňuješ se skupinových aktivit rád/a?
13. Kolik máš kamarádů?
14. Máš nějaké problémy ve škole?
15. S kým mluvíš, když Tě trápí nějaký problém? (s kamarády, s učitelem/učitelkou, s rodiči atd.)
16. Kdybys měl/a možnost něco změnit ve své škole, co by to bylo?
17. Co bys rád/a dělal/a v budoucnosti? (další vzdělání, práce, kariéra atd.)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Semi-structured interview questions for teachers (English version)**

Name: (optional):

Age:

Total number of teaching experience:

Professional qualification:

#### **A. Questions on teacher's background:**

1. How long have you been teaching in this school?
2. What subjects do you teach in this school?
3. Have you taught in special school before?
4. How many children with dyslexia do you have in your classroom?
5. How do you gain knowledge about dyslexia? (seminar, conference Internet, books etc)

#### **B. Questions on perceptions about students' self-esteem:**

1. What is your opinion about self-esteem of students with dyslexia?
2. Can you give me examples of how students with low self-esteem behave?
3. Do you think students with low self-esteem have more problems?
4. Can you give me examples of how students with high self-esteem behave?
5. Why do you think students with dyslexia have low self-esteem?
6. Are students with dyslexia involved in bullying? How?

#### **C. Questions on teacher-student relationship**

1. How do you show your students with dyslexia that you respect and understand them?
2. Do you talk to students with dyslexia about their problems?
3. Can you give me an example how it has helped a student with dyslexia?

#### **D. Questions on strategies to enhance self-esteem among students**

1. How do you help students with dyslexia to enhance self-esteem in classroom? (praise, encourage peer mentoring, counselling, group work etc)
2. How do you work with parents to solve children's problems with self-esteem?
3. Can you think of any other support that would help students with dyslexia to enhance self-esteem in school?

## APPENDIX E

### Semi-structured interview questions for teachers (Czech version)

#### Otázky k rozhovoru s učiteli:

##### **A. Otázky, týkající se dosavadních zkušeností učitele:**

1. Jak dlouho učíte?
2. Jaké předměty učíte?
3. Máte zkušenost s výukou ve speciální škole?
4. Kolik žáků s dyslexií máte ve své třídě?
5. Jak získáváte informace o dyslexii? (semináře, internet, vzdělávací kurzy, knihy atd.)

##### **B. Otázky, týkající se vnímání sebehodnocení žáků:**

1. Jaké sebehodnocení podle vás mají žáci s dyslexií ve vaší třídě?
2. Můžete, prosím, uvést nějaké příklady vysokého sebevědomí žáka s dyslexií?
3. Můžete, prosím, uvést nějaké příklady nízkého sebevědomí žáka s dyslexií?
4. Domníváte se, že žáci s dyslexií mají více problémů (studijních, kázeňských nebo emočních) kvůli jejich nízkému sebevědomí?
5. Proč si myslíte, že žáci s dyslexií trpí pocitem nízkého sebevědomí?
6. Jsou žáci s dyslexií nějakým způsobem zapleteni do šikany? Jak?

##### **C. Otázky, týkající se vztahu učitel – žák**

1. Jak dáváte najevo žákům s dyslexií, že si jich vážíte a že je respektujete?
2. Mluvíte s žáky s dyslexií o jejich problémech?
3. Můžete prosím uvést příklad toho, jak mluvení o problémech pomohlo žákovi s dyslexií?

##### **D. Otázky, týkající se strategií zvyšování sebehodnocení mezi žáky**

1. Jakým způsobem ve třídě podporujete žáky s dyslexií s nízkým sebehodnocením? (chválením, povzbuzováním vzájemné vrstevnické podpory – peer mentoring atd.)
2. Jak spolupracujete na řešení problémů svých žáků s jejich rodiči?
3. Napadá vás jakýkoliv jiný způsob podpory, který by mohl napomoci ke zvyšování jejich sebehodnocení ve škole?

**APPENDIX F**  
**Three Magic Wishes Task**

Each student was asked for three wishes relating to their expectations of school life:

“If you could have three wishes that could come true in school, what would you wish for?  
What are your three wishes? I will write them down.”

Wish 1 .....

Wish 2 .....

Wish 3 .....

**APPENDIX G**

**Describing Dyslexia as a Metaphor Task**

Each student was asked the following question to get their views on dyslexia:

“If you were to imagine dyslexia as some kind of “thing” or picture in your mind, how would you describe it?”

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**APPENDIX H**  
**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (English version)**

Each student was given a copy of the test and informed about its purpose and procedure. The questions below were read out one by one. The students responded according to the following Likert scale:

**1: Strongly agree    2: Agree    3: Disagree    4: Strongly disagree**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.				
2. At times I think I am no good at all.				
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.				
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.				
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.				
6. I certainly feel useless at times.				
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.				
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.				
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.				
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.				

*(Source: Rosenberg, M., (1989) Society and the Adolescent Self-Image, revised edition, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press)*

## APPENDIX I

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Czech version)

Každému žákovi budou položeny následující otázky, žáci odpoví podle škály:  
1 = zcela souhlasím    2 = souhlasím    3 = nesouhlasím    4 = důrazně nesouhlasím

	Zcela souh lasím	Souh lasím	Nesouh lasím	Důrazně nesouh lasím
1. Celkem vzato jsem se sebou spokojen/ a.				
2. Občas si myslím, že vůbec nejsem dobrý/á.				
3. Víím, že mám dost předností.				
4. Jsem schopen/schopna dělat různé věci stejně dobře jako většina jiných lidí.				
5. Mám pocit, že nemám být na co pyšný/á.				
6. Rozhodně si občas připadám neužitečný/á.				
7. Mám pocit, že mám jako člověk svou hodnotu.				
8. Přál/a bych si, abych si sám/sama sebe víc vážil/a.				
9. Celkem vzato mám tendence si myslet, že často selhávám.				
10. Zaujímám vůči sobě pozitivní postoje.				

(Source: Rosenberg, M., (1989) *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, revised edition, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press)



## APPENDIX J

### List of responses for Three Magic Wishes Task

Responses for Three Magic Wishes Task			
	Wish 1	Wish 2	Wish 3
Student A	Not to be stressed before exams	To obtain good marks for history, Czech and Maths	To gain more respect from peers and teachers in class
Student B	Better teachers (only one major wish)		
Student C	Not to change schools ever, forever to stay in this school	To know everything without having to study	Hopes everything will remain the same; safe in life and school
Student D	To give school a fresh coat of paint	To repair the windows in school	To receive better quality textbooks for all subjects (students get textbooks on loan so they are usually old and tattered)
Student E	One primary wish only: school is so disciplined it can be more relaxed. A more fun and informal way of teaching and a fun learning environment is better. I prefer an informal way of learning in school; some lessons are interesting. Do away with rigid, strict and one-way communicative teaching approach; it is interesting and fun if I know why I am learning the subject and how it can apply in practical life instead of learning something that I do not understand.		
Student F	Shorter hours for subjects and school	To start school at later hours	More practical work than theory
Student G	To make it successfully to next level of school (higher secondary level)	To finish school but to maintain friendship with all friends	To have shorter hours in schools and for lessons

## APPENDIX K

### Sample transcription of semi-structured interview for student

Date of interview: 09/06/2008 (20 minutes)

Name of student: *Student G (name of student withheld to protect confidentiality)*

School: *XXX (name of school withheld to protect confidentiality)*

Age: 15

Gender: *Male*

Grade: *8th*

Location of home: *Praha 6*

Year of diagnosis: *Last assessment between 2005 and 2006*

Other notes: *Special educational needs advisor present during interview as per parents' request; translator required (English teacher with five years of teaching experience)*

#### Interview answers

1. How are you feeling today?

*Good*

2. Can you tell me something about yourself?

*I am the second child in family. I have eight siblings from my parents' first marriages. Their age ranges from 24 to 32 years. I have two siblings of my own, one older sister aged 17 and one younger brother aged 13. My father is a technician and my mother works in a municipality office. I love animals. I have one turtle and one dog as pets.*

*My interest is playing football. I play for school and village teams. The village team members come from various villages in Prague 6. I have been playing for six years in midfield position. I also like to listen to rock music and go for cycling with friends.*

3. What are your personal strengths?

*I am friendly, good, nice and positive (very shy to tell at first, saying it is difficult to praise oneself).*

4. What do you enjoy most about school? Why?

*Friends. I really enjoy their company and spend a lot of time with them. I also can learn a lot from each other. Sometimes they also help him. I transferred to this school at 7<sup>th</sup> grade.*

5. What do you enjoy the least about school? Why?

*Long hours especially the afternoon school which stretches to 3.30pm. The school environment and teachers can be more relaxed. Compared to my former school which was quite relaxed, I have to do more work here but I am also learning a lot more.*

6. Do you think that you have to try harder than your friends to understand certain subjects?

*Not really. I have no problems as I learn to have better understanding of the subjects. So I can cope with all subjects. Especially the nature studies teacher is so good that I don't have to study at home. I also enjoy the lab work. It is very interesting to learn the subject at this school compared to my former school.*

7. What kind of extra help do you need with studies?

*My older brother helps sometimes at home with Chemistry and History.*

8. Do you talk to your teachers about your problems?

*Not really, not even about studies. I talk to my brother or friends.*

9. Do teachers notice your problems?

*I hope so; definitely in Czech language for example.*

10. Is there any teacher you approach more often for advice? What is he/she like?

*No*

11. Do you have any group activities in classroom or school? (discussion, project, etc)

*Yes*

12. Do you like to take part in group activities?

*Yes, very much as I prefer it to studying alone. We can learn and help each other.*

13. How many friends do you have?

*I have more friends in school than in the village. But I also spend time with village football team who come from other villages. We play friendly matches besides training or watch games together.*

14. Do you have any problems in school?

*No*

15. Who do you talk to when you have problems? (friends, teacher, parents)

*I talk to friends, parents (mother) and older brother.*

16. If you would have the chance to change anything about your school, what would it be?

*New uniform for sports teams especially the soccer team.*

17. What would you like to do in future? (ambition, higher education, job etc)

*Not sure yet. But I would like to do something using my hands in future such as take up carpentry or repair cars. I am inspired by my older brother who is an airplane mechanic. Perhaps I can take a diploma in vocational training school for three years.*

## APPENDIX L

### Sample transcription of semi-structured interview for teacher

Date of Interview: 13.06.2008

Name of teacher: *Teacher D (name of teacher withheld to protect confidentiality)*

School: *XXX (name of school withheld to protect confidentiality)*

Age: 37

Sex: Female

Professional Qualifications: *Degree from West Bohemian University (English and Russian)*

Position in school: *English language teacher; grades three to nine (primary and secondary)*

#### Questions on teacher's background:

1. How long have you been teaching?

*I have been teaching for two years.*

2. What subjects do you teach?

*English*

3. Have you taught in special school before?

*I have no experience teaching in special school.*

4. How many children with dyslexia do you have in your classroom?

*I teach six classes. Number of children with dyslexia ranges from two to seven per class. Class is divided into two groups if there are more than 24 students. The English lesson is divided into two groups according to ability or proficiency of students. For example, in class nine, I teach 14 students. There are seven children with dyslexia in class nine. In class eight, I teach 15 students of which eight students have dyslexia - five boys and three girls.*

5. How do you gain knowledge about dyslexia? (seminar, Internet, course, books etc)

*I gain knowledge about dyslexia through seminars. I attended a three-year seminar for Steiner schools. It was not focused on dyslexia per se but on human relations from a spiritual point of view. I learned about problem-solving methods for children with behavioural problems and special needs. It was about what they need at a particular age and what kind of development they go through. Every teacher talked about a pupil from her class and we discussed about the pupil's problems and how to solve them. I shared problems about children with dyslexia.*

#### **Questions on perceptions about students' self-esteem:**

1. What is your opinion about self-esteem of students with dyslexia?

*Self-esteem of students is usually problematic. It is often low because they are used to be considered as having problems and needed special care. They go for assessments by psychologists at pedagogical centres regularly once or twice year. They may feel not as clever as the other students. Sometimes classmates made fun of them for going for assessment. If there are many of them in the class, it is not a problem. For example, in class 6, there is only one student so there is a problem. Other children are sometimes cruel and made fun of the student.*

2. Can you give me examples of high self-esteem in students with dyslexia?

*There are twin sisters in class 5, 11 year olds who have high self-esteem. They are very lively and hyperactive but not focused and have poor attention span. They are used to "be it". They cannot concentrate much and often disturbed others by talking in class. They try to direct the lessons themselves. They are very self confident but concentration is rather bad. It is rather disturbing.*

*Those with strong personality can also do other things well. For example, some students are good in Maths or Physics. It depends on degree of dyslexia – the higher the degree, lower the self-esteem. If the degree is mild, self-esteem is usually high.*

*Another student in the same class is a phlegmatic 10 year old girl. She likes to wear eccentric clothes to attract others. She is very slow, seems to day-dream all the time - her consciousness is rather "sleeping".*

*Also in class eight and nine, there are the lively and phlegmatic types.*

3. Can you give me examples of low self-esteem in students with dyslexia?

*There is a boy in the 9th class, 15 years old, who is very lively. He likes computer games a lot. He is not very successful with girls and it affects his self-esteem. It is very difficult for him to write and for others to read it. If he types using a PC, he makes less mistakes. He sometimes disturbs others by talking in class.*

4. Do you think children with dyslexia have more problems (academic, disciplinary or emotional) due to their low self-esteem?

*I think they do. They have many disciplinary problems. Sometimes they cannot concentrate, so they are not interested in studies. For example, they play during*

lessons and try to distract others. Studies are also a major problem. They do not finish their homework and don't do much work as others although I gave them less work. Emotional problems such as stress, tension and depression are present. Younger pupils can be more stressed if they can't do the work within the time limit. Older children do not seem to care too much especially those in higher grades.

5. Why do you think students with dyslexia have low self-esteem? They feel they are different and need special care. Regular assessment, bullying and teasing affect them. Situation in family also affects school work. Class teachers usually talk to parents.

*It is hard to say about situation in school. In lower grades, children who are poor in studies have low self-esteem. In high grades, the situation is different. Students are not that interested in studies and are distracted by other factors. The low marks do not bother them too much. It is best to coach them from young. When they are adults, it is a bit too late. They don't listen to teachers any more.*

6. Are students with dyslexia involved in bullying? How?

*It does not happen often because this is a small school and we have better control of the situation. Once, a boy with dyslexia was a victim of bullying. The schoolmates put dog excrement in his lunchbox. In older children, it happens in class nine but it is not serious. Just teasing, laughing and making fun - so it is not a big problem.*

#### **Questions on teacher-student relationship**

1. How do you show your students that you respect and understand them?

*I praise them if they do something well. I do activities with them that are not so difficult. I modify the lessons so they can manage it. I give them less work. For example, I give shorter tests and assignments. The important thing is to encourage them. If children have problems, they cannot do their work. Sometimes they can do it quite well. So don't always expect them to have bad results. I give them the opportunity to be good at something and give them enough time to do it. I give good pupils extra work so the weak pupils can catch up.*

2. Do you talk to students with dyslexia about their problems?

*Not directly like using the words dyslexia (referring to their problems). I don't talk to them about dyslexia, only about work. I talk to them if they are depressed and if I have time. I am not a class teacher. I spend less time with them compared to class teachers who spend more free time with them or go for trips. They teach only one class. I teach six classes. But I have good relationship (quite good contact) with some students.*

3. Can you give me an example how it has helped a student?

*A girl in class five, 10 years old, has low self-esteem. She starts to cry when she is stressed. After giving her enough time and patiently repeating what she didn't understand, she started to do extra homework and improved her marks from 3 to 1.*

*For older children, it does not happen.*

#### **Questions on strategies to enhance self-esteem among students**

1. How do you support students with dyslexia who have low self-esteem in classroom?



*I give them the opportunity to be good at something. I talk to them and encourage them to work in groups. For example, in class five, I divide the class into three groups - I give good pupils more difficult work, the second group less difficult work and the third group easy work and I help them. In older children, there is problem with dividing into groups. In class eight, I let them divide into groups themselves. It is effective. Children like it. They have no problems working together. I praise them when they do something good. I give them more time during lessons. I give them space to give their ideas. If they want better marks, I let them prepare short report about what they are interested in. They have more time to decide what they want to do.*

2. How do you work with parents to solve children's problems?

*I meet with parents at regular individual meetings and I gave pupils my e-mail and phone number. Some parents write to me. Parents also meet with us once in three months. But class teachers have better contact. Sometimes we have meetings with parents and try to solve problems together with class teachers. I also talk to the class teachers about students' problems.*

3. Can you think of any other support that would help students with dyslexia to enhance self-esteem in school?

*A relaxed atmosphere in class is very motivating for them. I don't want pupils to be stressed, so I encourage group work, games, role play and give more time. It helps children who are more passive and withdrawn.*

*Peer tutoring (work in pairs) also helps. They can help each other. The good children like helping the poorer children, they feel important. Up from seventh class, the mixed pairs (boys and girls) do not work. It works with class six. Children with dyslexia like it, they don't feel shy. Sometimes it is effective and good method for children. I let them choose the pairs and sometimes I choose for them. I prefer oral assessment for children as written work is problematic for them.*

*School is stressful for children in secondary level. In upper secondary schools, the system is the same - the marks are important. I think children should learn how to cope with information and how to develop their personality; knowledge is not that important. For me, they must like English, not so much the knowledge. I prefer overall assessment of children instead of marks. In this school, children are better off because we know every pupil personally as it is small. Children sometimes come and talk about their upper secondary education and career.*

*Teachers play an important role in self-esteem. Pupils feel what you think about them. The way you talk to them and look at them makes them feel what you think about them. Teacher's attitude to children is important - they must respect and understand. It is not possible for subject teachers to have same rights as class teachers but they can still help the children and work with class teachers.*

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